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SEARCHING FOR THE CURE: SEXUALITY, MOBILIZATION, AND DISCOURSE
DEPLOYMENT IN LATIN AMERICA



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Preface

On a personal level, many factors have fueled my interest in the topic of sexuality in Latin America. In particular, my lifelong study of the Spanish language steered me south of my own national border. During my semester studying in Argentina, I found my own experience as a member of the LGBT community directing me to the gay pride parade in Buenos Aires, and calling my attention to the distinct experience of an LGBT Argentine as compared to my own. A few months later, I began to notice some of the activism and media attention growing around the cure clinics in Ecuador, and the sheer brutality of the phenomenon both fascinated and horrified me. Finally, I converted to Christianity while I was traveling in South America, an event that has distinctly shaped and informed my interest in the interaction between the global Christian Church and the LGBT community worldwide. It is my sincere hope that this unique set of biases will serve to enrich this project more than limit it, in some way contributing to the often complex and vexing discourse surrounding gay rights in Latin America.

Abstract

This study is designed to better understand why gay rights in Latin America are so liberally legislated and often so brutally violated in practice. It focuses on the phenomenon of reparative therapy, or the attempted curing of homosexuality, in Ecuador and Mexico. The study fills three theoretical gaps: first, by examining the often overlooked role of competing conservative actors in transnational activism; second, by exploring the interaction between conservative and liberal activists who mobilize around LGBT rights *outside* of the institutional sphere; and third, by undertaking a discursive examination of the arguments for and against the use of reparative therapies. The study shows, through discourse analysis, that these competing transnational advocacy networks frame their arguments shrewdly to achieve their desired policy change while simultaneously responding to one another. Their competing frames sometimes intentionally avoid engaging with the opponent's discourse, sometimes reframe the opponent's most effective rhetoric, and sometimes directly attack the opponent's language. These varied discourse deployments shape the face of gay rights by casting blame on different actors and by putting international pressure on local governments to effect change. The dance between transnational advocacy networks on all sides of the debate about LGBT rights is dynamic and responsive, and this examination reveals some of the mechanisms of that dance in Ecuador and Mexico. Because gay rights and reparative therapy are such highly controversial topics worldwide, this study reveals the contentious nature of opposing activist forces, thereby clarifying the processes by which change is effected in our globalized society.

Introduction

Much attention and scholarship within social movement theory has been dedicated to discovering what issues garner mobilization, what types of mobilization result, and what strategies and tactics are most effective in advancing a given agenda. Across this field of study, Keck and Sikkink's 1998 theoretical work in Activists Across Borders has played a canonical role in understanding the inner workings and motivations of transnational advocacy networks (TAN). Their boomerang model for activism, which suggests a model in which local groups in unfriendly political environments turn to a more sympathetic international scene in order to put pressure on unresponsive states, has shed light on the workings of a diverse variety of movements, from human rights to environmental advocacy and violence against women.¹ However, though this model has proven insightful in understanding the workings of progressive social movements such as those previously mentioned, it does nothing to examine the effects that opposing, often conservative forces have on the outcome of their activism efforts. This paper will attempt to identify and demystify the existence of and strategies behind a conservative transnational network that considers itself pro-family and works at odds with pro-gay activism in Latin America, particularly on the issue of sexual orientation change efforts.

Within the context of this paper, I examine the activism and organization surrounding attempts to "reorient" LGBT individuals in Latin America. The general issue of gay rights has garnered increasing attention and popularity in recent years, particularly in the Americas, as same-sex marriages, civil unions, adoption, and other issues have

¹ Margaret Keck, and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

gained traction. One of the most important characterizing factors in the ongoing debate about various LGBT issues, however, has been its opposition; particularly from religious groups with morally-based objections to the very principle of same-sex romantic relationships. With this in mind, it would be incomplete to examine both North and South American mobilization for LGBT issues without also considering their counterpart(s). Furthermore, this examination lends itself to a much broader set of implications. As Clifford Bob postulates in his recent book, The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics, global civil society is anything but monolithic, and investigating its contentious and conflictual nature at intersections of rival groups will shed light on the very complicated questions regarding the whys behind successful activism and policy formation.²

The boomerang model has proven insightful insofar as it serves to explain the process by which nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) play a part in advancing the agenda of the TAN they represent. What it does not explain, however, is the forms of resistance that impede these actors from fully achieving success. This paper therefore fills three gaps: first, by drawing connections between the framing of both pro-gay and pro-family TANs and their action in Latin America, it discusses not only the boomerang in action but also some of the forces that work to counter it. Second, this examination of discourse and framing furthermore reveals the role of the conservative Christian TAN in a context of on-the-ground activism, which further fills a gap in the existing literature's strictly institutional focus. The third gap this paper fills is the silence around reparative therapy; as a practice

² Clifford Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics*, (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chap. 1. Kindle edition.

that is becoming highly controversial in the United States, it remains largely unexamined on a global or transnational scale. More broadly, in light of the legal protections for the LGBT population that clearly do not always carry over into de facto protection in Latin America, an examination of the underlying forces such as contentious activism is required in order to understand gay rights in the region more realistically and less theoretically.

To begin, I will need to make a few qualifications. I am in many ways hesitant to introduce a topic with as broad a regional focus as “Latin America,” fully aware of its inability to adequately account for the heterogeneity of the region. The twenty-one nations that compose what is generally considered “Latin America” are diverse culturally, linguistically, racially, politically, and historically. At the same time, however, the arena of gay rights demands an examination that does not limit itself by national borders; in discussing a community and social movement that communicates, connects, and identifies often transnationally, my analysis would be incomplete if I were to ignore the transnational nature of the LGBT movement. The juxtaposition between the heterogeneity of individual Latin American nations and the arguable transnational unity of the regional LGBT movement certainly complicates the topic.³ For the purposes of this paper, I will be using the abbreviation LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*⁴) to refer to the social movement representative of the group of people who find themselves characterized by or identified with non-normative sexualities or gender identities. This is

³ This isn’t to say that the LGBT movement is homogeneous even within specific national contexts; however, the unifying nature of the “gay experience” is unique to the LGBT movement as compared to other social movements or identity groups. See, for example, Kollman and Waites’ characterization of the LGBT movement, 2009.

⁴ This asterisk serves to include the various trans- identities such as transgender, transsexual, and travesti.

not intended to serve as an exhaustive list or representation of those identities. Perhaps a more adequate term for the actual group of people to which I refer would be “queer,” but LGBT is a more accurate descriptor for the social movement and the main identities and groups discussed within its agenda. When I use the term “gay rights,” I use it as shorthand to refer to the rights of all sexual minorities, keeping in mind the varied experiences that are lived within the umbrella of queerness.

Though the overarching theme of this paper is gay rights in Latin America, I am unfortunately unable to analyze the subject as a whole in such limited space. For that reason, I will not be examining the (notably crucial) role of HIV/AIDS activism in both shaping the LGBT movement and attracting international attention to it.⁵ I also will not be delving extensively into the unique and often perilous situation of trans* Latin Americans, insofar as they experience their queerness and society’s reaction to it very differently from other sexual minorities. This analysis of the status of gay rights in Latin America, therefore, will be limited by its examination through the lens of attempts to cure LGBT individuals from what is perceived to be their unnatural or deviant sexualities. I expect this narrow angle to help control for the widely varying and often diversely framed arguments regarding these other issues.

As my intention is not to engage with the debate over the potential causes for non-normative sexualities, this paper does not extensively address the medical or psychological literature regarding homosexuality. I do, however, examine the medical

⁵ See Pecheny, Mario. “Sociability, Secrets, and Identities: Key Issues in Sexual Politics in Latin America.” in *The Politics of Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Javier Corrales and Mario Pecheny, 112-3; Rios, Roger. “Developing Sexual Rights: Challenges and Trends in Latin America.” 48.

community's input into the debate insofar as it directly engages with the issue of reparative therapy, and I analyze the medicalized discourse used in some texts that advocate for the effectiveness of reparative therapy. However, my concern in this thesis is the activism and discourse concerning the people that identify as part of the LGBT community in Latin America, regardless of why they come to do so. The pro-gay advocacy network is motivated, at least in part, by a moral concern for community's well being and basic human rights as they are affected by the presence of "cure" efforts in their communities. A significant gap in the literature on gay rights in Latin America is the issue of "reparative therapy" or sexual reorientation. Though psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy journals address this topic empirically, few if any published analyses exist referencing these "therapies" as they are practiced in Latin America. Furthermore, I will expound on the conservative pro-family network's engagement with topic of the origins of non-normative (read: non-heterosexual) sexuality as it informs its master frames, but I am more concerned with understanding the tactics and strategies behind this deployment than with assessing their accuracy.

The Problem

Latin America's recent track record as one of the world's most progressive regions in terms of gay rights legislation seems uncharacteristic in light of its historically traditional gender roles, heteronormativity, and machismo. On the books, not only have all Latin American nations decriminalized homosexual acts between consenting adults, but many have also provided for a variety of protections and rights including adoption rights, gender identity recognition, and even same-sex marriage in some countries.⁶ However, these progressive protections do not always carry over in practice. Recent instances of state sanctioned attempts to cure homosexuality indicate a normative understanding of sexuality that overrides the power of legislative protections for LGBT citizens. These states' navigation of the complicated issue of homosexuality, like many contentious issues, draws on the influence of Catholic and Christian historical, political, and cultural roots.⁷ Furthermore, "cure" efforts such as these sidestep the global medical community's rejection of this practice as likely ineffective and potentially dangerous.⁸ On a larger level, these programs pose a threat as perpetuating a state endorsed anti-gay discourse that acts as a normative obstacle to the acceptance of LGBT identities.

⁶ Encarnación, Omar. "Latin America's Gay Rights Revolution." *Journal of Democracy* 22.2 (2011): 104. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. Accessed Oct 1 2012.

⁷ See also Rios, Roger. "Developing Sexual Rights: Challenges and Trends in Latin America." 49; Klaiber, Jeffrey. "The Catholic Church, moral education and citizenship in Latin America." *Journal of Moral Education*. 38. no. 4 (2009): 407-420.

⁸ APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. (2009). *Report of the Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, p 42; Pan American Health Organization, "'Cures' For an Illness that Does Not Exist: Purported therapies aimed at changing sexual orientation lack medical justification and are ethically unacceptable." Web. Last Modified May 15, 2012. Accessed March 26, 2013.

Despite some of the most progressive legislation on behalf of LGBT citizens worldwide in place in Latin America, and globally disseminated medical research decrying the practice as ineffective and harmful, efforts persist to “cure” or “heal” homosexuality. I will be using this “cure” phenomenon as a lens through which to examine both conservative Christian mobilization and pro-LGBT mobilization. Arguably, actors on all sides of the issue might be characterized as part of transnational advocacy networks, though the objects of their advocacy are undoubtedly at odds. By extension, I will be analyzing the discourse(s) of the various activists, politicians, and organizations involved and what it reveals about the underlying give and take between pro- and anti-gay actors. I will be approaching this topic from the perspective of two cases: the abuse of lesbians and transgender women in de-homosexualization clinics in Quito, Ecuador, and the state sponsored but internationally driven “Path to Chastity” (Camino a la Castidad) workshop in Jalisco, Mexico. I depend on these cases as illustrations of a larger phenomenon, which is the conflict and contention between conservative and progressive TANs. I will be comparing the discourse and interaction of various actors in each of these instances of “cure” phenomena in order to better understand their effects on the campaigns and shapes of their opponents’ activism, and perhaps to complicate the boomerang model and shed some light on the dynamic rivalry that characterizes modern transnational activism.

These two cases of cure efforts are in many ways unique; though both took place in urban Latin American settings (Guadalajara, Mexico and Quito, Ecuador), their political and historical contexts differ. The Jalisco case is characterized by the involvement of an international Catholic organization and conservative local politicians,

whereas the cure clinics in Quito are a more organic presence, setting up shop in hundreds of sites recognized by the state as drug abuse and alcoholism rehabilitation clinics.⁹ However, these phenomena also share quite a bit in common; participants (or victims) in both cure programs are frequently minors whose parents enroll them, often unbeknownst to them or against their will. Both instances share links with international organizations, and both exist at intersections of a pro-gay human rights discourse and pro-family, religio-scientific and often medicalized discourse. At the core of both of these cases lies a violation of fundamental human rights, though perhaps different rights, which have in both cases been established and recognized by the legislative structures of their governments and the international community.

I propose that, despite significant differences in these two cases, this cure phenomenon as it operates within the complex nexus of forces that shapes gay rights is narrow and unique enough to link the two. In both instances, despite reasonably progressive state legislative protections for LGBT citizens, human rights are being gravely violated. By analyzing the issue in this manner, this paper will attempt to reveal some of the trends underlying the interaction between local and international, gay and ex-gay, and the religious and the secular as they shape the face of transnational mobilization and discourse about gay rights in Latin America.

I present the Mexican case as a consideration of the larger role of conservative and religious international actors in propagating the often religio-scientific discourse that legitimates—or at least tries to justify—continued attempts to cure, heal, or “reverse” homosexuality. The Ecuadorian case, then, represents an examination of the same issue at

⁹ IGLHRC, “Status of Lesbians and Trans Women in Ecuador: Shadow Report.” P 10-11.

the local level; though at the international level, pro-gay NGOs played a key role in raising support and awareness of the grave crimes being committed, the conversation really took place locally—amidst activists, authorities, and the individuals affected. That is to say that both cases reveal different faces of the same TANs. In Mexico, international religious NGOs and foundations played the most visible role, whereas in Ecuador the conservative forces are more muted and locally based. Analyzing the complicated interactions of the various elements of each TAN will be indispensable in understanding the underlying trends of this transnational activism, especially as they occur in our globalized world. As Keck and Sikkink indicated in their boomerang model, the links across borders within TANs determine crucial avenues through which activism takes place.¹⁰ In the words of international activist Charlotte Bunch, “the local and the global are always different dimensions of the same struggle.”¹¹

In examining the Ecuadorian case, the role of transnational advocacy in shaping local policy will undoubtedly come into question. Keck and Sikkink’s model for sidestepping noncompliant states to seek an opening of political opportunity structures, the “boomerang pattern,” certainly provides insight into the inner workings of the LGBT movement in Ecuador, but it does not take into consideration the role of opposing or antagonistic inter- and transnational actors, nor does it address the fact that obstacles to rights are not always state imposed.¹² As Roger Rios points out, “rights, realities, social

¹⁰ See Keck and Sikkink, 1998. Chapter 1, “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International Politics: Introduction.” 1-16.

¹¹ Warshow, Joyce. *Passionate Politics: The Life and Work of Charlotte Bunch*. Produced and directed by Tami Gold. Brooklyn, NY: AndersonGold Films, 2011.

¹² Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. “Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics.” *International Social Science Journal* 51, no. 159

and governmental efforts are pieces of a complex social, political, and legal puzzle” in which laws, attitudes, norms, and cultural factors interact with, inform, and shape one another.¹³ In these particular Latin American cases, both states at least appear to support and protect the basic human rights of their LGBT citizens. The real obstacles to equality tend to lie in social norms and in the competing discourse of opposition groups. That is to say that the human rights violations committed, for example in Ecuador, would not be able to exist without the underlying assertion that homosexuality can be cured in the first place, a central frame to some of the conservative actors at work on the issue.

The nuances and complexities of gay rights in Latin America will undoubtedly evolve and emerge faster than scholarship can deconstruct and analyze them. However, due to the international and widely deployed “cure” discourse, as exemplified in countries as diverse as Uganda, Iran, Brazil, and the United States, we can no longer afford to ignore how it plays out in the arena of LGBT human rights. The clearly transnational nature of the activism surrounding gay rights in general becomes even more crucial in understanding the roots of such cure efforts which result in torture, rape, and the institutionalization of minors against their will. In nations for which homosexual behavior can warrant dire penalties such as prison time and execution, and amidst concerns that transnational networks are fomenting these policies, examining the workings and interactions of these TANs becomes more and more critical. One need look no further than the flood of headlines in 2009 and 2011-12 regarding the involvement of American Christian actors in informing and encouraging what became known as the

(March 1999): 93. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 27, 2012).

¹³ Rios, Roger. "Developing Sexual Rights: Challenges and Trends in Latin America." 50.

Ugandan “kill the gays” bill, which would institute the death penalty for acts of “aggravated homosexuality.”¹⁴ Just a few of the Americans involved included Scott Lively of Abiding Truth Ministry and Don Schmierer of Exodus Global Alliance, who allegedly depended on controversially inaccurate links between homosexuality and pedophilia found in Richard Cohen’s book Coming Out Straight in order to justify and spread their anti-gay position.¹⁵

¹⁴ Kaoma, Kapyia John. *Colonizing African Values: How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa*. Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 2012. <http://www.politicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/Colonizing-African-Values.pdf> (accessed March 23, 2013).

¹⁵ Sharlet, Jeff. "DANGEROUS LIAISONS." *Advocate* no. 1041 (September 2010): 29-37. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 29, 2012). See also the discussion of the topic in Bob 2012: Chapter 3, section entitled “Bashing Networks.”

Boomerangs, Basic Rights, and Backlash

Much of my analysis will be based on literature regarding transnational advocacy networks, discourse analysis, and competing discourses between the LGBT and conservative movements. A central text with which I will be engaging is Keck and Sikkink's Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics, a foundational work within social movement theory that establishes the "boomerang effect" as the main explanation for how local social movements sidestep noncompliant state governments.¹⁶

Transnational Advocacy Networks

Keck and Sikkink's definition for a transnational advocacy network (TAN) accurately and succinctly delineate a TAN's characteristics. Within a network of activists, these defining characteristics include: (1) the centrality of values in motivating formation; (2) moral concerns' priority over material concerns; (3) the international links between relevant actors, notably including non-governmental organizations (NGOs); (4) international action taking place on behalf of a cause or group of people; and (5) information exchange playing a central role in the coherency of the network.¹⁷ Furthermore, TANs are more likely to exist in historical periods characterized by rapidly shifting problem definition, and most likely to rally around issues of bodily harm to vulnerable populations or of legal equality of opportunity.¹⁸ Both the LGBT and conservative Christian movements in this examination demonstrate these characteristics clearly.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Keck and Sikkink, (1998): 1-10.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 10-12, 27, 200.

Keck and Sikkink also emphasize the centrality of the exchange and deployment of information to the success of a TAN. The process of organization around an issue has been widely examined in social movement scholarship. Generally speaking, this process requires the identification of an issue as problematic, attributing blame to a target actor, proposing a solution, and providing a rationale for action within a resonant frame.¹⁹ This sequence of steps has been elsewhere described as the problem stream, policy stream, and politics stream, which combined strategically in concert with the political opportunity structures and resources available, form the central agenda setting process of a TAN.²⁰

Social movement theory over the past several decades has attempted to explain the motivations for mobilization and reasons for their success and failure. These explanations have developed from a purely structural approach to a focus on resource mobilization, making sense of a movement's successes and strategies as products of both the political structures and the resources available to the movement. The central role of the framing of an issue within a particular network or movement has gained traction and value as scholars have drawn direct links between the construction of meaning and the political opportunities and resources available in a given political climate.²¹

Political opportunity structures consist of a combination of institutional and normative factors that determine the avenues for action and obstacles present for a given social movement. Often described as at least partial determinants of the strategies and frames employed by movements, these are unique to each national setting and to some

¹⁹ Keck and Sikkink 1998: 201. See also Snow, David and Robert Benford. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 137-8.

²⁰ Joachim, Jutta. "Framing Issues and Seizing Opportunities: The UN, NGOs, and Women's Rights." *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (June 2003): 250.

²¹ Snow and Benford in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*: 152.

extent contingent upon the specific actors within each network. They can include details like the structures of domestic and international institutions, the type and number of allies within those institutions, and the resonance of a movement's collective action frames.²² Therefore, the political opportunities available to pro-family actors mobilizing around LGBT rights will differ from pro-gay actors mobilizing around the same issue, and that this same interplay of mobilizations will look different in Mexico than Ecuador.²³ Sidney Tarrow indicates that internationalism as we know it today further complicates the traditional model of political opportunities, expanding potential targets, resources, and opportunities both horizontally and vertically.²⁴

Further research in this field establishes a link between the framing of a movement's agenda and the degree of effectiveness with which it navigates the political opportunity structures available to it.²⁵ This applies both to the general phenomenon of NGOs adapting frames to be more appealing to the international community and to the more specific phenomenon of human rights discourse's wide acceptance in international venues.²⁶ The framing process has been described as the discursive construction or assembly of a set of situations and events in order to align an issue with potential routes of action and resonate within the existing opportunity structures.²⁷ The crucial elements

²² Keck and Sikkink 1998: 201-2. See also Bob 2012: Chapter 2, section titled "Activating—and Deactivating—Institutions."

²³ Bob 2012: Chapter 2, section entitled "Constructing—and Deconstructing—Problems." See also Meyer, David S. and Suzanne Staggenborg. "Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity." *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 6 (1996): 1635.

²⁴ Tarrow, Sidney. *The New Transnational Activism*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005: 8-9.

²⁵ Ibid, 143-160. See also Snow and Benford 1992: 151-2.

²⁶ See Joachim 2003; Kollman and Waites 2009

²⁷ Keck and Sikkink 1998: 17; Snow and Benford 1992: 137-8.

of political opportunity structures that influence framing strategies include: access to institutions, allies within them, and political conflict.²⁸ These first two are reasonably self-explanatory in terms of their importance to constructing the opportunities available to a given network. The role of political conflict in shaping political opportunities and thereby the framing processes employed does not go far enough as it is explained, however; it does not take into consideration the types of conflicts that arise between frames of opposing movements. Framing serves as much to present an issue as worthwhile as to disarm an opponent, and as each side presents a frame it shifts the face of political opportunities for the other by creating collective action frames, drawing media attention, motivating the opponent's mobilization, or by influencing the norms in action in the international realm.²⁹ Snow and Benford describe the appearance of conflicting frames as indicative of the weakening of a movement's master frame, but within the context of contentious movements, this framing war is as much a strategic tactic as an indication of the innovative power of each network as it responds to its opponents.³⁰

Keck and Sikkink postulate "governments are the primary 'guarantors' of rights, but also among their primary violators."³¹ This suggests how the conception of "the state" as a monolithic force has been challenged; various agencies and legislations often act at

²⁸ Joachim 2003: 251-52.

²⁹ Bob 2012: Chapter 2, section entitled "Constructing—and Deconstructing—Problems." See also Meyer and Staggenborg 1996: 1634.

³⁰ Ibid, see also Snow and Benford 1992: 150.

³¹ Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. "Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics." *International Social Science Journal* 51, no. 159 (March 1999): 93.

odds with one another.³² The constitutional protections provided LGBT Latin Americans as they are contradicted by the actions of other state bodies exemplifies this incongruency. In fact, this fragmentation of purpose and motivation also takes place within movements themselves. Although global civil society is divided into various actors, the networks and organizations within it are by no means coherent or unified in purpose or identity.³³ The ideological and strategic differences of the ex-gay movement from the larger Christian Right in the United States perfectly captures the ways in which otherwise similar actors within a movement can turn in against one another.³⁴

According to Keck and Sikkink, the boomerang effect essentially represents the efforts of a TAN to respond to the state's blockage of their policy goals by appealing to NGOs in another state, which in turn look to allies in the international arena. The resulting pressure by foreign actors on the state thereby helps effect the desired change.³⁵ In other words, Keck and Sikkink examine local activist groups attempting to pass liberal legislation on various issues in states with unresponsive or uncompromising governments. By appealing to international actors with sympathetic views, these local activists have historically leveraged their international support to pressure their government to change. This dynamic reflects the complexity of the transnational scene as it provides a variety of venues within which social movements can act and launch their appeals. Other authors corroborate this theory, further examining and expounding upon

³² Lisa Duggan, and Nan Hunter, *Sex Wars: sexual dissent and political culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4; Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 32.

³³ Bob 2012: Chapter 1. See also Buss, Doris, and Didi Herman. *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003: xviii-xxv;

³⁴ Burack, Cynthia. *Sin, Sex, and Democracy*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 10.

³⁵ Keck and Sikkink 1998, 200.

the relationship between the domestic opportunity structures and the more receptive international arena to open opportunities or change policies at a state level.³⁶

In the time since the creation of the boomerang, however, scholars have done some finessing. For example, Thomas discusses the phenomenon in normative terms, indicating that a state's acceptance of a certain international norm provides the means by which non-state actors might leverage their pressure.³⁷ This normative influence allows non-state actors a measure of influence and power that otherwise is relegated strictly to traditional power wielded by state actors. He further qualifies the boomerang as contingent upon the vulnerability of the state to external pressures, using the United States as an example of one that might be more resistant to international influence, due to its rich strategic and material resources.³⁸ Others address the boomerang as more political; within the context of domestic politics, certain campaigns simply would not be possible without the parallel efforts of international actors. The political opportunity structures available on the domestic and international levels characterize and inform the strategies used by the networks, as well as the extent of their success.³⁹ However, the LGBT network, for example, finds the international political opportunities to be friendlier than local settings in part because of the widespread acceptance of the human rights

³⁶ See also Kollman, Kelly, and Matthew Waites. "The global politics of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender human rights: an introduction." *Contemporary Politics* 15, no. 1 (March 2009): 1-17; Thomas, Daniel. "Boomerangs and Superpowers: International Norms, Transnational Networks and US Foreign Policy." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. 15. no. 1 (2002): 25-44.; Batliwala, Srilatha. "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors: Implications for Global Civil Society." *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. 13. no. 4 (2002): 393-409.

³⁷ Tomas 2002: 26, 44.

³⁸ Ibid: 26, 44.

³⁹ Joachim 2003: 249.

language that they have integrated into their discursive deployments. This normative acceptance in turn exerts moral soft pressure on the unfriendly state, but the extent to which these norms are internalized by the state culture remains dependant upon a complex conglomerate of local factors.⁴⁰

Sidney Tarrow further complicates the boomerang structure, arguing that the process of externalizing a movement's goals depends on the type of blockage it experiences from its state. Therefore, varying categories of blockage (repressive, facilitative, or unresponsive) will result not only in different courses of action, but also in different framing processes.⁴¹

LGBT Mobilization and Human Rights Discourse

In terms of employing human rights discourse in the LGBT movement, the construction of "LGBT" identities determines whose human rights are being discussed. Collective identity has been documented as a powerful but volatile tool for social movements to garner mobilization.⁴² As some authors suggest, the "anti-assimilationist character of queer activism" is incompatible with "human rights discourse, which requires stable categories" and even requires the normalization or minimalization of gay identity in order to establish a universal human identity in its place.⁴³ Others assert that the categories of LGBT are unstable and culturally defined, limiting or endangering their

⁴⁰ Kollman and Waites 2009: 9.

⁴¹ Tarrow 2005: 145-152.

⁴² Friedman, Debra and Doug McAdam. "Collective Identity and Activism: Networks, Choices, and the Life of a Social Movement." In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 156-170.

⁴³ Sheill, Kate. "Losing out in the intersections: lesbians, human rights, law and activism." *Contemporary Politics*. 15. no. 1 (2009): 56.

applicability in a universal discourse such as that of human rights.⁴⁴ The prevalence of the travesti identity in Latin America is one example of such culturally unique identities that do not receive universal recognition. Despite these concerns, human rights discourse has been broadly adopted as the main medium by which transnational LGBT activists might garner international attention and support, as recently as the 1980s and more notably in the early 90s. The incorporation of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, along with the creation of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, have tinted the current transnational LGBT movement with a distinctly human rights orientation.⁴⁵

Some texts present the benefits and progress as a result of this human rights frame. Groundbreaking international work in the realm of declaring the link between human rights and gay rights became visible with the publication of the Declaration of Montreal in 2006 and the Yogyakarta Principles in 2007. Fifty-four state signatures graced the Joint Statement on Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the UN Human Rights Council in 2006. In 2008, the Organization of American States adopted a similar resolution titled “Human Rights, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity.” However, despite all of these developments in international political opportunity structures, Kollman and Waites indicate, “very few legally binding provisions protecting LGBT people exist in international law, particularly outside Europe.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See Kollman and Waites 2009, 2; Sheill 2009, 56.

⁴⁵ Kollman and Waites 2009, 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 6.

Despite these developments, some scholars persist in problematizing the human rights frame. Angelia Wilson points out that the “human rights” frame only has value insofar as it is deployed within a context that already ascribes it meaning, which she indicates tends to be limited to liberal democracies and Western ideology.⁴⁷ Other authors take to a social constructionist approach to understanding human rights, interpreting the popularly accepted formulation of human rights as “socially and historically bound” and thereby containing a morality- and capitalist- centered bias.⁴⁸ Keeping with this train of thought, the human rights frame might run the risk of carrying with it rhetorical undertones of the neoliberal forces that have become so politically unpopular in many Latin American countries. Matthew Waites critiques the employment of terms such as “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” within international LGBT human rights discourse as perpetuating and privileging a binary model for sexual identities. He further concludes that this “grid of intelligibility” prioritizes subjectivity over conduct, thereby rendering it less useful in cultural contexts in which identity politics are less relevant to gay rights as in Western cultures. For example, many opponents to gay rights in Latin America (and worldwide) use language that distances homosexual behavior from identity, rendering it incompatible with more Western conceptualizations of rights based on gay identity. He further argues that the incorporation of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” at the international level does

⁴⁷ Wilson, Angelia R. "The 'neat concept' of sexual citizenship: a cautionary tale for human rights discourse." *Contemporary Politics* 15, no. 1 (March 2009): 82. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 5, 2012).

⁴⁸ Stammers, Neil, *A Critique of Social Approaches to Human Rights*, Human Rights Quarterly, 17, no. 3 (1995): 492

not necessarily indicate the elimination of inequality so much as a reframing of the oppression.⁴⁹

These concerns ring true especially in the developing world; Latin American nations concerned with the effects of neoliberal imperialist influence from the US may be less well-represented by predominantly US-generated language. At the same time, however, human rights language tends to resonate well in Latin American nations as a result of a regional rash of dictatorships and state perpetrated human rights violations throughout the 70s and 80s. These details complicate the dynamic of human rights discourse in Latin America, the examination of which I do not undertake in this project. Further research on the topic would complement this study well.

Conservative Christian Mobilization

The literature, though broad and comprehensive in its examination of LGBT human rights and transnational activism, largely ignores the “cure” and ex-gay phenomena as I discuss them in this paper. Furthermore, transnational advocacy network literature widely accepts the boomerang pattern, with a few caveats, often in reference to liberal social movements and NGOs. However, much less scholarship addresses the contentious and fragmented nature of global civil society as it arises out of conflict between opposing movements. The boomerang model falls short in its examination of transnational activism as a relationship strictly between progressive organizations, their international allies, and the noncompliant states they wish to influence, completely

⁴⁹ Waites, Matthew. "Critique of 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity' in human rights discourse: global queer politics beyond the Yogyakarta Principles." *Contemporary Politics* 15, no. 1 (March 2009): 152-3. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 6, 2012).

disregarding the role of opposing networks in the equation.⁵⁰ The realm of LGBT activism and mobilization is no exception.

Notions of countermovements vary. Zald and Useem describe countermovements as reactionary developments that arise as a direct result of the political opportunities formed by a group's mobilization.⁵¹ As Meyer and Staggenborg elucidate, by this model "movements thus create their own opposition."⁵² However, a more complex description of countermovements allows them more autonomy and agency; rather than a reactionary force that only forms as a response to a given mobilization, these are networks that share objects of concern in the political realm, whose opposing ideologies directly shape both their opponents and the opportunity structures within which their interactions take place.⁵³ These countermovements—or perhaps more accurately, conservative networks—contain as many fragments and divisions as their progressive counterparts and indeed global civil society as a whole.⁵⁴

The independence of opposing movements does not discount the interactive and formative nature of the relationship between them. Indeed, Herman points out that the rising popularity of homosexuality on the American Christian Right's (CR) agenda in the

⁵⁰ Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996: 1629.

⁵¹ Zald, Mayer, and Burt Useem. "Movement and Countermovement Interaction: Mobilization, Tactics, and State Involvement." (1987): 247.

⁵² Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996: 1632.

⁵³ Ibid, 1632-33. See also: Bob, Clifford. *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012: Chapter 1. Kindle edition; the conception of the "Christian Right" network in Buss, Doris, and Didi Herman. *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003: xviii-xxv; and the "transnational conservative patriarchal network" and "unholy alliance" that have formed around sexuality issues in Chappell, Louise. "Contesting Women's Rights: Charting the Emergence of a Transnational Conservative Counter-network." *Global Society: Journal Of Interdisciplinary International Relations* 20, no. 4 (October 2006): 493.

⁵⁴ Buss and Herman, 2003: xviii; Bob, 2012: Chapter 1.

1980s was “no doubt in response to the growing visibility of gay rights demands and the grassroots antigay activities of local organizers.”⁵⁵ In this case, both the pro-family and LGBT movements represent actors mobilizing around a similar issue from opposing ideological perspectives. Neither movement can accurately be characterized as the “backlash” or “countermovement” of the other. They are mutually influential; their framings, activities, and strategies impact the shape of the opponent’s network.⁵⁶ This impact is apparent from the very beginnings of the mobilization process, as opposing movements must account for one another even in the ways they construct and frame the problem.⁵⁷ The dynamic toolbox from which conflicting networks select framing strategies includes such tactics as shaming, challenging norms, and “framejacking”.⁵⁸ Therefore, an in-depth examination of the framing process and inner workings of TANs no longer allows for a simple characterization of “backlash.” We must approach these interactions as dialogues between equally rational and autonomous movements if we wish to understand them as productively and objectively as possible.

Although complications in the world of social movements and transnational activism have been fleshed out to some extent, even the most recent scholarship falls short in assessing conservative networks as they interact with progressive ones in local contexts. More specifically, the LGBT network takes action in a wide variety of global settings. However, the scarce scholarship on conservative Christian networks’ interactions with LGBT issues is largely limited to the United States or the arena of the

⁵⁵ Herman, Didi 1997: 61.

⁵⁶ Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996: 1632-3.

⁵⁷ Bob 2012: Chapter 2, section entitled “Constructing and Deconstructing Problems.” See also Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996.

⁵⁸ Bob 2012: Chapter 2, section entitled “Persuasion and Dissuasion.”

UN.⁵⁹ Though the UN serves as an alternative arena in which NGOs and TAN actors can attempt to effect change, it is not the only one in which their discourse manifests. In practice, these networks influence the discourse, structure, and strategies deployed by one another at the ground level. This rhetoric takes shape within the media and other local forms of expression, and not only within international political institutions. Though scholars lend validity to the varied cultural expressions of the dialogue between Christians and the LGBT community in the US, this same archival examination in other national contexts remains to be seen.⁶⁰ Furthermore, international institutions, far from being neutral forums for democratic organization, are characterized by privilege and bias.⁶¹ Although examining the interactions of our opposing movements within the context of the international political sphere can shed light on the political dimension of the conflict, we must keep in mind that the international arena, though it acts as a new site of political contestation outside of domestic politics, is not inherently democratic, because access to it warrants a certain degree of political and material privilege.⁶² Examining the intersection of Christian and LGBT discourse as it is harnessed outside of the international forums thereby contributes to our understanding of the conflict as it takes shape free from the limitations of the UN.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Chappell 2006, Herman 1997, Buss and Herman 2003, Burack 2008, and Bob 2012: particularly Chapter 3.

⁶⁰ Jordan, Mark. *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk About Homosexuality*. (Chicago: London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), "Introduction: Sexual Characters."

⁶¹ Bob 2012: Chapter 2, section entitled "Activating—and Deactivating—Institutions."

⁶² Buss and Herman 2003: 136.

At the Intersection: Discourse Deployed Between Christians and Queers

Much has been said about the many ways Christians talk about homosexuality.⁶³

These examinations of discourse have taken shape through analyses of changing rhetoric over time, region, and purpose. Furthermore, these analyses in themselves are often expressions of Christian or gay scholars and therefore also form part of the discourses they attempt to deconstruct and analyze. This scholarship is almost exclusively American in focus.⁶⁴ Many of the actors in Latin America that I discuss are directly affiliated with American organizations, so it is not surprising that the US discourse bleeds across national borders. Furthermore, rather than being limited by state borders, TAN discourse is more shaped and limited by the ideological borders between non-state actors. That is to say that there is no longer an “American” or “Ecuadorian” discourse so much as an “LGBT” or “cure” discourse. However, the unique contextual shaping of these distinctly US-born discourses in a foreign setting has not been examined to any great depth. These intersecting and competing discursive deployments have become increasingly clearly linked to the dynamics of their corresponding social movements. This link necessitates a context-sensitive examination of this discursive intersection as it takes unique shape in each national expression of the transnational phenomenon. These are the gaps this paper intends to fill, or at least address.

⁶³ See, for example, Burack 2008, Jordan 2011, Herman 1997, and Yarhouse, Mark A. and Stanton L. Jones. *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁶⁴ I use the term “American” hereafter as an adjective to describe the United States, for lack of a replacement that might be more accurate and less exclusive of the other two thirds of the American continent.

Methodology

I employ discourse analysis as my main methodology for better understanding this puzzle. As a philosophically constructivist methodology, its primary concern is with the “construction of a broader social reality,” “how that social reality came into existence,” and what forces help hold this reality in place.⁶⁵ Therefore rather than seeking to understand the underlying moral truth of the matter, for which both conservative and progressive groups claim unique ownership, this thesis seeks to analyze and deconstruct the discourses that are employed by each network. This approach is valuable in that it avoids the blind reification of existing categories that often results from other methodological approaches.⁶⁶ Arguably, a greater understanding of one’s opponent allows for a greater ability to respond; as the literature shows, none of the responses and strategies employed by these actors is accidental. The discourse they employ creates a “repertoire of concepts which can be used strategically by members of the community to influence the social construction of identities and to support the institutionalization of practices and patterns of resource distribution.”⁶⁷ My real goal in this discursive examination is to reveal this “repertoire of concepts” used in one of the most contentious and rapidly changing debates in modern transnational mobilization. As previously mentioned, the strength of Catholic and Christian influence in Latin America even further necessitates an understanding of their discourse and ideology as one of the forces helping to create and shape the current debate around gay rights. Furthermore, the

⁶⁵ Phillips, Nelson, and Cynthia Hardy. *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*. Qualitative Research Methods, vol. 50. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002: 6, 9, 13.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 13.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 32.

aforementioned crucial role of framing in the presentation of a certain issue marks the especially salient role of language deployment in characterizing the ultimate shape of an issue as it is discussed and acted upon in an international setting.⁶⁸ Finally, this approach is particularly suited to the examination of issues that relate to identity, as it critically examines the forces that construct and influence identity. With the very nature of gay identity under contention at the center of this debate (i.e., nature versus nurture), and the centrality of Christian identity to the membership of the Christian pro-family TAN, this method equips me with the analytical tools to navigate the complexities of the issue.

Discourse analysis has proven useful in deconstructing the debate about homosexuality within Christian movements, and various authors have taken this approach in varying manners. Didi Herman, in her book The Antigay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right, deconstructs a Christian publication over a period of time in order to better understand the discursive arguments and attitudes within the Christian Right regarding homosexuality.⁶⁹ This discourse analysis proved particularly effective in its neutrality; in examining the rhetorical positions of the Christian Right as a movement rather than their moral validity, Herman succeeded in unmasking the movement's ideological dependence on the concept of the heterosexual family unit as the pillar upon which society stands, which in turn makes sense out of the vehemence with which the actors defend their position. More recent work includes Mark Jordan's examination of "sexual characters" and cultural "archives" within American Christian churches, examining the particular role of adolescence as a rhetorical figure which "represents the possibility and peril of sexual indeterminacy," rather than any actual population of young

⁶⁸ Joachim 2003: 51.

⁶⁹ Herman 1997.

people in any given time period.⁷⁰ This book further explores the American church's interaction with and navigation of changing rhetoric on sex and gender, which Jordan explains largely as an appropriation from clinical terminology, sexology, psychiatry, slang, and political language.⁷¹ Cynthia Burack also takes this approach in her work Sin, Sex, and Democracy: Antigay Rhetoric and the Christian Right, pointing out the political motivations that lie behind changing discourses about the same topic depending on different audiences. This versatility of discourse reflects what Burack characterizes as different motivations, including “dog whistle politics,” a softening of rhetoric by not explicitly claiming Biblical authority, and nichemarketing.⁷² These politically motivated shifts in rhetorical deployment exemplify social movement scholars' descriptions of the framing process and demonstrate clearly how discourse analysis can serve to reveal details about the political action of a movement.

For the purposes of this paper, I describe both networks in more or less neutral terms; because of its underlying rhetorical position, the largely Christian movement which is often characterized as “anti-gay” and “fundamentalist” could also reasonably be described as “pro-family,” in the sense that a majority of their discourses depend on a fundamental commitment to the defense of the “natural family.” This ideology, which is founded upon the non-negotiable unit of the heterosexual married couple, acts as a central pillar of the network's international alliance building⁷³ and carries fewer stigmas than some of the other terms they are assigned.⁷⁴ In contrast, despite the LGBT transnational

⁷⁰ Jordan 2011: xiii-xiv.

⁷¹ Ibid. xii.

⁷² Burack 2008: 6.

⁷³ Buss and Herman, 2003. See especially Chapters 1 and 6 and reference on p 2.

⁷⁴ See Herman, Didi, 1997: 13.

network's dominant rights-centered discourse, its more general characterization as "pro-gay" appears throughout the literature. I plan to employ these terms along with "conservative" and "progressive" mobilization in order to distinguish between the two camps. Despite the arguable conservative-progressive dichotomy as I present it here, I expect this examination of social movement interactions to shed light on the interactions that take place between social movements regardless of their political alignment.⁷⁵ In fact, a simple conservative and right wing/progressive and left wing characterization of the actors within these social movements falls short. As Didi Herman indicates, the identity of the pro-family Christian Right is not reducible to the simple "right wing" label as its motivations are largely social and completely leave out the economic dimension.⁷⁶

The selection of these cases was in part due to the accessibility of data; as an undergraduate, I am unable to perform the necessary field research to access information about cure efforts in places where they do not receive much media attention. I also selected the Ecuador case in part because of the gravity of the situation. Such blatant human rights violations and such clearly incomplete remedies for them call for urgent attention to the matter. Though the Mexico case does not carry the same obvious urgency, the links it shares with drastic anti-gay legislation in Uganda reveals that it may have equally insidious roots. The cure phenomenon is by no means isolated in these two nations. In my preliminary research, I found evidence of it in places as diverse as—and not limited to—Venezuela, Peru, and Honduras. However, the international implications in terms of human rights violations combined with the availability of data directed my

⁷⁵ Bob, Clifford, 2012. Kindle edition. See Chapter 1, "Definitions and Caveats."

⁷⁶ Herman, Didi. *The antigay agenda : orthodox vision and the Christian right* . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

attention toward Ecuador and Mexico. With further resources, examination of this topic in other countries would only serve to enrich this discussion.

My data was almost entirely obtained via Internet, and consists of a variety of texts including blogs, websites, media outlets, international publications, and official documents. These texts are American, Ecuadorian, and Mexican publications primarily, with texts from some international and transnational activist groups as well. I uncovered them using localized search engines (for example, Google Ecuador) and links in media publications, and therefore my data depends largely on the accessibility of the various texts. Though this has been limiting in some ways, it also forces the data to be a true representation of the texts—and the discourses they contain—that are available to the larger public. In that sense, this limitation also forces my data to be representative of the true debate in its most current form. Though discourse analysis as a methodology leaves plenty of room for flexibility in terms of analytical methods and guidelines for data selection, Phillips and Hardy provide some general criteria for which data to use: texts which are widely disseminated, which cause a change in practice, and which are reactions to an event. My selection of texts includes examples of all of these.

Mexico and Ecuador: Cures in Action

These case studies are designed to provide a jumping-off point from which to examine the larger phenomenon of transnational activism around LGBT issues. For that reason, though I focus on the specific situations in Mexico and Ecuador, my analysis moves away from the specifics of each country and into the details of the transnational advocacy networks that work within and outside of them.

Mexico

In March of 2010, Mexico City's legalization of same sex marriage took effect in the capital, and not without backlash in other parts of the nation.⁷⁷ In November of that same year in Guadalajara, Mexico, lay Catholic organization Courage International sponsored a three-day workshop called "Camino a la Castidad" (The path to chastity). Within a matter of weeks, *El Universal*, a predominant Mexican media outlet, published a report on the potentially scandalous use of government funds for the affair. The Secretary of Human Development in the state of Jalisco was accused of contributing an amount equivalent to almost \$30,000 USD over the course of two years to one of the workshop's main sponsors, a civil society organization called Valora AC, under the category of "promoting family values."⁷⁸ The head speaker at that year's workshop was Richard Cohen, a prominent Catholic and "ex-gay" therapist who has been featured in recent media attention for his involvement in the recent revival of the Ugandan anti-homosexuality bill whose authors unabashedly advocate killing all homosexual

⁷⁷ Bacigalupo, Andres. "México: se "rebelan" cinco estados contra la ley de matrimonio gay," Noticias Gays. UniversoGay.com. Web. Last modified Nov 23, 2010. Accessed March 6, 2013.

⁷⁸ Pérez-Stadelmann, Cristina. "Gobierno de Jalisco paga "terapia para curar gays." *El Universal*, Compañía Periodística Nacional. Web. Last modified March 23, 2010. Accessed March 6, 2013.

Africans.⁷⁹ Among other works, Cohen is the author of a book titled Coming Out Straight: Understanding and Healing Homosexuality, which has now been translated into at least five languages—Spanish, German, Polish, Italian, and Croatian—and distributed worldwide. His book is based on what he describes as his personal journey of converting himself from gay to straight, as well as his professional history of attempting to do the same for others. Cohen made a guest appearance on the Rachel Maddow show in March of 2010, in which he was sharply criticized for feeding the Ugandan government’s belief that homosexuality is unnatural—by supplying them with his text—in order to justify passing anti-gay legislation.⁸⁰ The interview with Maddow reveals that his book was, in fact, used as an authoritative reference in the drafting of the “Kill the Gays” bill, providing the needed justification to treat homosexuality as a punishable crime. Cohen’s credentials as a therapist have been called into question as a result of his 2002 expulsion from the American Counseling Association on the grounds of ethical violations.⁸¹

Richard Cohen’s involvement in the Jalisco conference is no small detail. As a leading figure for the ex-gay movement in the United States, and Executive Director Emeritus for the International Healing Foundation, his international activism on behalf of conversion or reparative therapy for non-heterosexual folks has disseminated a large volume of texts and rhetoric worldwide. The language employed by the International

⁷⁹ Sharlet 2010.

⁸⁰ Rose, Adam J. “Richard Cohen: Gay-to-Straight ‘Therapist’ Spars with Rachel Maddow (VIDEO).” The Huffington Post. Web. Last modified May 25 2011. Accessed March 6, 2013.

⁸¹ Airhart, Mike. “Counseling Professionals Expelled PFOX President for Ethics Violations.” Ex-Gay Watch. Web. Last modified January 25, 2005. Accessed March 6, 2013; Besen, Wayne. “Press Release: ANTI-GAY P-FOX PRESIDENT RICHARD COHEN EXPELLED FOR LIFE FROM THE AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION.” WayneBesen.com. Web. Last modified January 25, 2005. Accessed March 6, 2013.

Healing Foundation revolves around the organization's respect for "the client's right of self-determination" and helping those who experience "unwanted SSA [same sex attraction]"⁸² This volume of texts will be the source for a bulk of my discourse analysis in the Mexican case, as their discussions of homosexuality apparently had enough legitimacy to justify government sponsorship. The scientific, therapeutic, and psychoanalytic language used in these texts will reveal the underlying influence of American conservative Christian rhetoric about homosexuality as well as the unique form it takes in Mexico.

Raúl Vargas López, head of the powerful leftist political party Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), called for investigation into the involvement of Jalisco governor Emilio González Márquez in response to the scandal of government involvement. This investigation called into question the governor's explicitly anti-gay position that had recently elicited criticism at the third Ibero-American Family Summit in Guadalajara, when he announced that the idea of gay marriage "grossed him out."⁸³ This scandal also raised various concerns about the separation of church and state, in which the state funding of the conference received criticism on a level that was somewhat isolated from the specific issue of gay rights. The different arguments employed in order to shut down and protest against the Camino a la Castidad revealed the centrality of the separation of church and state in Mexican culture as the concept intersects with this cure

⁸² International Healing Foundation. "We Believe." Web. Accessed March 6, 2013.

⁸³ Bacigalupo, "Gobierno de Jalisco paga "terapia para curar gays." See also Bacigalupo, Andres. "México: el gobernador de Jalisco dice que le dan "asquito" los matrimonios homosexuales." Noticias Gays. UniversoGay.com. Web. Last modified Oct 12, 2012. Accessed March 6, 2013; and "Los gobiernos creyentes." Editorial, El Universal Compañía Periodística Nacional. Web. Last modified Nov 23, 2010. Accessed March 6, 2013.

workshop. Despite this scandal, Camino a la Castidad has continued in Mexico, on independent funding, as the annual conference for Courage Latino.

El Universal reported the experience of individual participants at the conference, most of whom were young gay men or boys accompanied by their parents. Some had been enrolled against their will, and both the children and their parents were being called to repent from their sins in order to receive healing from God for homosexual desires. Based on Cohen's model for explaining the roots of homosexuality, the kids' parents were held partially responsible for their children's deviant sexuality in their failure to provide a model of healthy gender roles and family relations. The conference, rife with Bible references, talks on morality, and ex-gay speakers, apparently called both for a chaste lifestyle and the curing of homosexuality; one speaker was quoted as assuring the attendants that "you are in sin, and if you are not cured as soon as possible, you are going straight with Satan to Hell" (my translation).⁸⁴

Courage International, the sponsor of this workshop, is a Catholic organization based in Connecticut, but it has branches in twelve different countries worldwide, including in Latin America: in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Puerto Rico. Its branches within Mexico span 13 different states, including Mexico City and Jalisco. Its website sports recommendations to other homosexuality cure- or therapy- centered organizations, including Exodus International and the International Healing Foundation. The transnational conservative Christian community has a deep and powerful influence in the discourse employed internationally regarding homosexuality, and the simple presence of this discourse legitimizes efforts to cure homosexuals into straightness. This case in

⁸⁴ Pérez-Stadelmann, Cristina. "Gobierno de Jalisco paga "terapia para curar gays."

particular, therefore, represents one face of the conservative Christian transnational network as it takes shape in Mexican politics around LGBT issues.

The overall lack of international attention to this issue on behalf of the LGBT transnational network is striking. Despite the transnational movement's concern with and research of a wide variety of issues facing LGBT Mexicans, the issue of conversion therapy has scarcely been addressed. Perhaps this could be attributed to the human rights framework that is so central to the LGBT TAN: issues that are not as clearly violating internationally accepted human rights are not as likely to gain traction in the international realm. The only exception to this silence came in May of 2012, when the Pan American Health Organization, the branch of the World Health Organization for the Americas, released a report condemning reparative therapy as "a serious threat to the health and well-being of affected people" and called for these practices to be exposed as such.⁸⁵ I will be examining the language used in the condemnation of reparative therapy in my later section entitled "Transnational Talk: Pro-LGBT, Anti-SOCE."

With this in mind, it could well be that we are just now witnessing the beginning of the process of transnational framing of reparative therapy in human rights terms. If this is indeed the case, it will require some closer examination to understand how this process got started and what steps have thus far been taken. Local LGBT rights groups have not always been the driving forces behind campaigns to get this issue on the international agenda, however. This challenges the boomerang model as a complete explanation for how and why international actors have gotten involved; what about when local NGOs

⁸⁵ Pan American Health Organization, "Media Release: World Health Organization Releases Groundbreaking Report Condemning 'Conversion' Therapies." International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia. Web. Last modified May 17, 2012. Accessed March 6, 2013.

aren't appealing to the international community? Perhaps the very visible conservative Christian cure rhetoric motivates this newfound international concern regarding reparative therapy. In fact, this sudden attention in the international sphere can be explained as potentially a strategic response to the conservative Christian network's perceived successes. Networks often engage with various institutions within which they expect their opposition to have weaker influence.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the discourse of the PAHO's anti-conversion therapy campaign seeks to dismantle the assumptions that validate reparative therapy in the first place. The competing discourses revealed by these opposing forces expose the underlying strategies and interactions of the LGBT and Christian TANs.

This cure phenomenon, clearly not an isolated incident even with Latin America, is beginning to gain international attention, despite the local activists being relatively silent on the issue, as in Mexico. The Mexican case, therefore, represents a local expression of the international face of the Christian TAN, to which the international face of the LGBT TAN responds. It is to this interaction that I now turn.

Reorientation Rhetoric: Coming Out Straight

The purpose of these two "Reorientation Rhetoric" sections is to examine how the conservative Christian TAN, represented in part by the actors involved in Camino a la Castidad, discursively constructs and defines homosexuality. I focus on web pages, publications, and chapters that directly engage with the definitional aspect of this topic. In this section I examine a collection of texts that present non-normative sexual expression as a disordered condition from which people can be cured or healed. This

⁸⁶ See Bob 2012: Chapter 2, sections entitled "Activating—and Deactivating—Institutions" and "Dynamics of Conflict."

rhetoric is characteristic of a specific group of conservative Christian actors, and this discourse is often known by the moniker “ex-gay.” Because of his central involvement in the 2010 Camino a la Castidad, I analyze the first two definitional chapters from Richard Cohen’s internationally distributed Coming Out Straight: Understanding and Healing Homosexuality, and some of his positions as he expressed them in a 2011 interview with Rachel Maddow. I also examine this transnational network through the most relevant actors in the Mexico case, which include the International Healing Foundation, Courage International, and Exodus Latinoamérica. The commonalities between their discourses on the topic reveal the links that hold them together as a network. This network constructs homosexuality as a gender identity disorder, resulting primarily from childhood emotional wounds. It separates homosexual desire from gay identity, and medicalizes the desire such that with a measure of divine intervention, “change is possible.”⁸⁷ The network also heavily emphasizes the individual’s right to self-determination, indicating recognition of the efficacy of the human rights frame to garner support. By framing homosexuality as medically disordered, the Christian TAN justifies sexual orientation cure efforts (SOCE) as part of an attempt to promote the health and well being of the human race, and is able to cast the blame upon a broken, sinful society.

Camino a la Castidad is an annual international conference for Courage International in Mexico on how to navigate homosexuality. Richard Cohen, as the featured speaker of the 2010 conference that I am concerned with here, and a high-profile articulator of ex-gay ideology, serves as an accessible source of discourse to analyze. His

⁸⁷ See Cohen 2006: Preface; International Healing Foundation. “Coming Out...Loved.” Web. Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://www.comingoutloved.com/>; Courage Latino, “¿En qué creemos?” Web. Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://courage-latino.org/courage/en-que-creemos>.

clear delineation of (what he understands to be) the definition, nature, and causes of homosexuality and his role in presenting at the Courage International conference qualify him as a representative of the discourse deployed on a larger scale by the TAN of conservative Christian pro-family actors. Though Cohen's book goes in detail about therapeutic practices and methods, I limit my examination to his definitions and descriptions of homosexuality in order to reveal how the pro-family TAN constructs homosexuality. Though Cohen's prescribed responses to homosexuality would perhaps merit their own examination in another paper, I limit my consideration to the definitional element because it has proven powerful on the international scene in terms of justifying a wide variety of consequential and "therapeutic" responses.

The cover of Richard Cohen's book is a text in itself; the proclaimed "Revolutionary New Idea!" of Coming Out Straight: Understanding and Healing Homosexuality is the tag line found throughout the introductory sections especially: "*No one is born with same-sex attraction, and change is possible.*"⁸⁸ In the center of the cover sits a photo of Cohen posing with a woman, presumably his wife or significant other based on the closeness of their positioning, both wearing warm smiles and modest dress. Her left hand, placed on his chest, bares no wedding ring, though the photo credit indicates she shares his last name. A crooked line passes across the left side of the cover and behind the photo, coming out on the right said straight; underneath the name Richard Cohen, M.A. the caption reads, in capitals: "*SOMEONE YOU KNOW NEEDS THIS BOOK!*" The book is labeled under the category "self-help/sexuality," and the back cover begins with the introductory line "Everyone knows someone with a homosexual

⁸⁸ Cohen 2006: see Preface.

orientation.”⁸⁹ The title itself carries a layered set of meanings; Cohen juxtaposes coming out as a gay experience with coming out as reminiscent of the Exodus of the Jewish people, a “coming out” of bondage guided by God. Before even turning to a page, this book has already communicated clearly its central themes of change, straightness, and the easy resolution of a problem with the simple guidance of the contents within.

Cohen’s language in these chapters draws on several thematic foundations. Much of the terminology he employs is concerned with the possibility of change, the differentiation between identity and behavior, medical or pseudo-medical terminology and evidence, causation of homosexuality, identity and gender identity, and several dichotomous themes such as natural versus unnatural, true versus false, and right versus wrong. Cohen’s language, even simply within the context of the first two chapters of his book, recalls the well-documented model for social movement organizations to effect change that I described in my introduction. It is a multi-step process, calling for problematizing an issue, attributing blame, proposing a solution, and justifying action within a resonant frame.⁹⁰ His argument in these pages follows a very similar model. It is rhetorically representative of the pro-family TAN as a whole, which has problematized homosexuality as the result of emotional and psychological wounds, blamed primarily modern cultural systems and broken relationships, proposed therapy, and justified that therapy within a Christ-centered and faith-driven, but also practical and pseudo-medical frame.

⁸⁹ Cohen 2006.

⁹⁰ See my previous discussion in the introductory section entitled “Transnational Advocacy Networks.”

First, Cohen describes the problem: that some people find themselves with an *unwanted* non-normative sexuality. “I believe that anyone who desires to heal from same-sex attraction (SSA) may do so. By following this four-stage model of healing, obtaining support from family, friends, and mentors, and seeking God’s guidance each step of the way, I know that you or your loved one will come out straight.”⁹¹ His religious inclination is by no means covert, and in this way he is able to relegate some responsibility for the success or failure of his program to the will of God. He sprinkles his introductory chapters with medical or quasi-medical phrases like “same-sex attraction (SSA),” “opposite-sex attraction (OSA),” “homo-emotional,” “hetero-emotional,” “homo-social,” “hetero-social,” “prehomosexual,” and “unwanted (ego-dystonic) same-sex attractions.”⁹² With this language, Cohen positions himself with an authoritative medical ethos at the outset of the book, thereby attempting to combat being dismissed as a proponent of the kind of “blind fanaticism” that the international medical community characterizes as unreliable at best.⁹³ In fact, in some instances Cohen combines religious and scientific discourse, attempting to equate the scientific interpretation with the theological one. This combination attempts to legitimize religious language that would otherwise carry little weight in the scientific world: “what is now being described as genetic predispositioning may also be interpreted as transgenerational ‘sin’ or the

⁹¹ Cohen 2006: Preface.

⁹² For context, see especially the Preface.

⁹³ See the Pan American Health Organization, ““Cures” For an Illness that Does Not Exist: Purported therapies aimed at changing sexual orientation lack medical justification and are ethically unacceptable.” Web. Last Modified May 15, 2012. Accessed March 26, 2013: 1

http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=17703.

multigenerational transmission of unresolved family issues.”⁹⁴ This attempt to garner scientific credibility through medicalized language also accounts for his lack of professional accreditation. As Rachel Maddow pointed out in her interview, the letters behind Cohen’s name indicate his master’s level of education, but falsely imply more adequate credentials as a therapist.⁹⁵

The audience for whom Cohen writes in this book is primarily composed of individuals who are already to some degree aligned with his ideology; it’s for those who desire to “come out” of homosexuality and their allies, both professional and familiar.⁹⁶ The text rarely explicitly addresses the underlying reasoning for why its readers might desire to leave their homosexuality, but the implicit Judeo-Christian discussion of God and Cohen’s scattered references to the naturalness of heterosexuality as compared to the unnaturalness of homosexuality suggest that conservative Christian ideology is a driving motivator for individuals to try to change. In discussing the healing of homosexuals, Cohen writes: “We all fall short of our original design for greatness. When we heal ourselves, the world heals a little more.”⁹⁷ The assumption here, of course, is that the original design for greatness includes heterosexuality, the main attribute from which homosexuals fall short and must be healed. In following this line of reasoning, Cohen begins to enter into his examination of the explanations for homosexuality, which are necessitated by its unnaturalness. In contrast, as a default setting for human sexuality, heterosexuality requires no explanations. Bible passages and Christian theological

⁹⁴ Cohen 2006: 30.

⁹⁵ Rose, Adam J. “Richard Cohen: Gay-to-Straight ‘Therapist’ Spars with Rachel Maddow (VIDEO).” The Huffington Post.

⁹⁶ Cohen 2006: xv, xvi.

⁹⁷ Cohen 2006: 15.

arguments are rarely deployed as a justification for this set of norms, which serves to make the text accessible both to individuals who do and do not recognize the Bible as the authoritative word of God.

Cohen describes homosexuality and same-sex attraction (“SSA”) as fundamentally the result of emotional wounds, and therefore a disordered way of interacting with the world: “homosexuality is a same-sex attachment disorder” and “Being homosexually oriented is therefore *not gay, nor bad, but SSAD!*”⁹⁸ Cohen carefully distances the orientation from the behavior, distinguishing between “being homosexually oriented” and being “gay,” thereby leaving room for individuals to elect to identify as gay or otherwise, regardless of the attractions they feel. In his section entitled “Definitions,” he describes:

The ‘gay’ man or woman is one who has accepted homosexual desires and reports feeling comfortable with those feelings. The ‘nongay’ homosexual person is one who does not accept those desires and seeks to change... ‘Homosexual is not used as a noun for referring to a person, but is used as an adjective to describe a person’s thoughts, feelings, desires, and behaviors.’⁹⁹

His apparent concern for individual autonomy is complicated, however. He encourages those folks wishing to change their sexual orientation to pursue their dream, even though “it is neither popular nor fashionable to explore the possibility of changing from a homosexual to a heterosexual orientation at this time.”¹⁰⁰ He affirms the individual right

⁹⁸ Ibid. 27. Italics in original.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 18.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. x.

of self-determination, particularly as it applies to the ex-gay movement, claiming that those who wish to “come out” of homosexuality are the victims of intolerance because of their unwillingness to embrace their homosexuality.¹⁰¹ However, his language in other sections borders on oppressive to the individual’s autonomy, agency, and self-knowledge. He describes homosexuality as a “symptom” of a “homo-emotional love need,” unmet by a parent, which is an “unconscious, hidden, profound wound in the soul.”¹⁰² In other places within his section on causation, Cohen continues to assert the deeply unconscious and unknown nature of the wounds that cause homosexuality: the “In the heart of every man or woman who experiences same-sex desires is a sense of detachment from his or her same-sex parent. This may be at a very unconscious level, as the imprinting for this condition may have occurred in utero and in early infancy.”¹⁰³ When not removing individuals’ agency, Cohen’s language infantilizes them: “This same-sex ambivalence causes feelings of love and hate to occur at the same time. He seeks bonding with a man, but underneath that need is an angry and hurt little boy.” By framing the causes of homosexuality as unknowable to the individual without the help of an ex-gay therapist either to uncover them or to guide the “hurt little boy” inside, Cohen places himself in the position of power. He removes the agency of the individual to know him or herself and transfers it to the therapist, who consequently makes money providing such therapy.

Central to Cohen’s characterization of homosexuality as disordered is his definition of what constitutes order. Throughout these chapters, he describes gender

¹⁰¹ Rose, Adam J. “Richard Cohen: Gay-to-Straight ‘Therapist’ Spars with Rachel Maddow (VIDEO).” The Huffington Post. Web. Last modified May 25 2011. Accessed March 6, 2013.

¹⁰² Cohen 2006: 24-5.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 36.

identity from an essentialist point of view: “Gender identity is an awareness of one’s masculinity or femininity.”¹⁰⁴ In this view, healthy men are strictly masculine, and healthy women are strictly feminine, so that “when he [a boy] rejects his primary sources of masculine identification, he is essentially rejecting his own core gender identity.” Cohen attributes certain characteristics and hobbies to the masculine and the feminine, such that there can be “gender nonconforming behaviors.”¹⁰⁵ Rather than viewing gender as a set of socially constructed, binary categories which do not occur naturally in human beings but are learned behaviors, Cohen believes that both sexes have a unique nature: “the young child may become more and more estranged from his or her own gender and internalize the nature of the opposite sex.”¹⁰⁶ Within this view, a person who identifies with the wrong gender is thereby going against the natural order of human existence.

Cohen dedicates a significant fraction of his definitional chapter to disproving the argument that individuals can be born gay: “What becomes abundantly clear is that there is no scientific data to support a genetic or biologic basis for same-sex attraction.”¹⁰⁷ This attempt to invalidate the opposition’s scientific foundation, consisting of an absence of evidence rather than a presence of evidence to the contrary, reflects the strategic attempt to discredit the opposition common to TANs. Homosexuality is further evidenced to be a disorder using statistics about the poor physical and mental health of the LGBT community: “Homosexuality is a developmental disorder that leads to immense ‘dis-ease’ and emotional unrest.”¹⁰⁸ Cohen asserts that

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 26.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 33.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 35.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 18.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 48.

...These statistics show us clearly that homosexual behavior is neither normal nor natural. Members of the homosexual community argue that social intolerance and prejudice cause these destructive behaviors. I believe there is some merit to this argument. However, the deeper reason for these unhealthy behaviors is the emotional brokenness that caused the homosexual condition in the first place. The social prejudice merely exacerbates the already-existing pain lodged deep in their souls.¹⁰⁹

By approaching homosexuality as the result of a compilation of childhood wounds and gender misidentifications, rather than a defiant choice or moral transgression, Cohen and the ex-gay movement as a whole shift the blame from the homosexual person to their environment. This tempers the severity of the violation of the heterosexual order, and allows the movement to project an image of compassion, acceptance, and tolerance towards the LGBTQ community. This further allows them to align, more or less, with the APA's explanation of the causes of homosexuality:

...No findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.¹¹⁰

However, unlike the APA, Cohen and the ex-gay movement assert the disorderedness of homosexuality, and seek to reveal the factors that cause it so that they can be "healed."

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 49.

¹¹⁰ American Psychological Association. "Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality." *Psychology Help Center*. 2012. Web. Oct 1 2012 <<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx>>.

Shifting the blame onto external factors rather than the basic nature of individuals in turn aligns theologically with the rest of the Christian Right. Just as the Christian Right demonizes elements of the international system, such as agencies of the UN, as “the instruments of the antifamily movement,”¹¹¹ Cohen and the ex-gay movement cast the blame for the presence of homosexuality on the social and cultural forces of our world. Cohen uses vivid sexual violence imagery in order to illustrate the invasive evil of worldly forces: “Cultural wounds are experienced from the media, educational system, entertainment industry, Internet, and pornography. These influences lead us to the molestation of the mind.”¹¹² He describes the presence of porn online as “sexual abuse and the rape of our children's minds.”¹¹³ The growing acceptance of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle is simply the result of the successful gay movement’s agenda of propagating lies: “Communism and the homosexual movement have both utilized the same strategy, which is known as the Big Lie Theory....If you repeat anything long enough, and loud enough, over time it will become known as a fact”¹¹⁴ Demonizing the gay movement as motivated strictly by lies also presents Cohen and his ministry as comparatively the messengers of truth. Ultimately, the blame is placed on the cultural factors that permit an individual to grow up with “Same-Sex Attachment Disorder/SSAD,” providing those who wish to change homo to hetero with several demons against which to align: the liars who say being gay is natural, the parents who raised queer folks wrong, and the culture we inhabit for condoning the aforementioned. I now turn to the transnational application of this same language.

¹¹¹ Buss and Herman 2003: 47.

¹¹² Cohen 2006: 46.

¹¹³ Ibid. 48.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 47.

Reorientation Rhetoric: The Transnational Advocacy Network

As Keck and Sikkink have elucidated, a transnational advocacy network meets the following criteria: it is value-driven, morally rather than materially motivated, composed of international links between organizations (particularly NGOs), it takes action on behalf of a specific group of people, and is primarily designed to facilitate the exchange of information across borders. In light of these qualifications, I examine the “About” pages, including the discussion of goals and/or beliefs on the websites of the International Healing Foundation, Courage Latino, and the Mexico-based Exodus Latinoamérica, to uncover the transnational advocacy network (TAN) of international conservative Christian actors working on sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) in Latin America.

The International Healing Foundation (IHF), founded by Richard Cohen in 1990, primarily utilizes and expands upon the same language he deploys in his book. Originally located at www.changeispossible.com, that URL now redirects to www.comingoutloved.com. Even the shift in web addresses reveals a shift in discursive strategy; where asserting that change was possible was effective in the past, now it appears compassion is the most resonant frame for the IHF. However, this is not to minimize the possibility of change; next to Cohen’s photo and biography on the main page appears the following phrase in bold: **“Cohen knows personally and professionally that *change is possible!*”**¹¹⁵ The “About” page features the APA description of the causes of homosexuality that I quoted in the previous section, and goes on to assert that “We uphold your right of self-determination, to follow the path that fills

¹¹⁵ International Healing Foundation. “Coming Out...Loved.” Web. Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://www.comingoutloved.com/>.

your heart with love.”¹¹⁶ By appealing to this sense of compassion and love, IHF presents itself as an advocate *for* rather than *against* the LGBT community. The frame IHF uses overwhelmingly calls upon the rights of self-determination and autonomy, and the right to seek out alternatives to living a “homosexual, bisexual, transgender, or transsexual life.”¹¹⁷ This contradictory reframing of rights, which goes directly against the opposition’s discussion of reparative therapy as *violating* basic rights, indicates IHF’s awareness of the resonance of rights rhetoric in the international arena.

As a further example of this reframing process, the IHF site features a link to its most recent 2012 petition, entitled: “Petition to Support the Human Right of Self-Determination for Individuals with Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction (SSA) to Receive Counseling and Psychological Treatment.” This title reflects a variety of rhetorical tools that Cohen and the IHF employ to defend reparative therapy. Primarily, framing self-determination as a human right reflects an awareness of its effectiveness in garnering support. In fact, it reflects a response to its opposition by attempting to commandeer their most effective discursive tool, human rights. The abbreviation of same-sex attraction to Cohen’s coined acronym, SSA, medicalizes homosexual desire so as to present it as a condition that warrants treatment. The petition further frames the right to receive counseling and psychological treatment as if it were threatened by the actions of its opponents. This reveals the contested nature of the definition of access to treatment; pro-LGBT activists wish to improve well-being by eliminating treatments which they frame as harmful, and pro-SOCE activists wish to improve well-being by establishing people’s

¹¹⁶ International Healing Foundation. “About IHF.” Web. Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://www.comingoutloved.com/about-ihf>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

basic right to SOCE treatments, which they frame as medically legitimate. The body of the petition goes on to emphasize that this issue doesn't just affect people, but specifically represents "efforts...on the state and national level ...to take away the rights of minors..."¹¹⁸ Finally, the employment of an online petition as a tool to garner widespread support further mimics the petition efforts of the pro-LGBT TAN.¹¹⁹ This reveals the responsive nature of the discourse of the IHF; it reflects and counters the discourse used by its opponents, and attempts to take advantage of the political opportunities that have proven successful for the other side. Though this petition focuses strictly on the political situation in the US regarding SOCE, and does not deal with Latin America, the IHF forms part of a transnational network of pro-SOCE actors. The links on its site, under a tab titled "International Organizations," direct readers to eighteen other pro-SOCE organizations of varying religious affiliations that include Catholic, Jewish, Presbyterian, Mormon, and Methodist. This indicates the cross-denominational nature of this TAN; its links are delineated more by agreement on the approach to homosexuality and less by agreement on a faith tradition.

One of the international organizations sponsored on IHF's website is Courage International, the Catholic backer of the Camino a la Castidad conference in Jalisco. The website of the Latin American branch of this organization, Courage Latino, sports testimonies, resources, articles, and details about homosexuality and those trying to live a chaste life. The site's publications have a Catholic ideological bent that is largely absent in the IHF discourse. The site is Spanish, and all translations here are my own. Courage

¹¹⁸ International Healing Foundation. "Legislative Petition." Web. Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://www.comingoutloved.com/legislativepetition>.

¹¹⁹ See my section entitled "Petition Presentation," page 74.

Latino's five goals are heavily steeped in Christian language, referring to living chaste lives of friendship and service "...in accordance with the Catholic Church's teachings regarding homosexuality." On the "What We Believe" page, Courage Latino describes the Catholic catechism regarding homosexuality, summarized as follows: "The Tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered'...they are contrary to natural law."¹²⁰ However, a further catechism establishes that "They [men and women with "homosexual tendencies"] should be accepted with respect, compassion, and delicacy. Any sign of unjust discrimination against them should be avoided."¹²¹ This element of compassion again serves to construct Courage Latino as at the service of the gay community, rather than working against it. This constitutes the "advocacy" element in the transnational advocacy network; these actors truly construct themselves as working on behalf of a certain population. Courage finally establishes that "homosexual people are called to chastity," describing self-control as a form of "inner freedom."¹²² This theme of liberation is one of many rhetorical threads that run through all of these organizations' discourse.

Though different from Cohen's language in its explicit dependence on Catholic teaching as authoritative, much of the discourse from Courage Latino runs parallel. In fact, the last section on the "What We Believe" page addresses "sexual reorientation": "Recent scientific evidence recognizes that nobody is born with a homosexual orientation and that in some cases CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. Even though we support our members,

¹²⁰ Courage Latino, "¿En qué creemos?" Web. Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://courage-latino.org/courage/en-que-creemos>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

who by their own decision, choose this path, it is no our goal or objective.”¹²³ This capitalized and emphasized tag line recalls Richard Cohen’s regular assertions that “change is possible” in his book, and also draws a parallel to the former URL for the IHF website. Furthermore, by asserting that change is possible rather than probable, these organizations construct a goal for which people with “unwanted SSA” can strive, whether or not it is one many people achieve. These discursive commonalities indicate the links between these organizations, despite their differences.

Exodus Latinoamérica, a branch of Exodus Global Alliance based in Morelos, Mexico, also shares discursive links with its companions. Its purpose, according to the “What is Exodus Latinoamérica?” page, is:

To proclaim that it is possible to overcome SSA (Same-Sex Attraction), when we submit ourselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ. To equip churches to sustain a biblical perspective of sexuality, but to respond with compassion and grace to people affected by sexual brokenness. To serve people affected by sexual brokenness through counseling, support groups, and other services.¹²⁴

Again, we see a medicalization of the condition of same-sex attraction, a call for a degree of compassion, and an emphasis on homosexuality as an expression of sexual brokenness. Finally, it presents SOCE as an act of service to those individuals trying to overcome their sexuality, thereby presenting it as an expression of love and compassion, rather than a hateful desire to change someone’s nature. Furthermore, Exodus shares an

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Exodus Latinoamérica. “¿Qué es Exodus Latinoamérica? Nuestro Propósito.” Web. Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://exoduslatinoamerica.com/>.

understanding of worldly order with the rest of the Christian Right, which distinguishes between God's will for creation, and the fallen nature of humankind. Their beliefs page emphasizes that heterosexuality is part of God's original ordered design: "EXODUS LATINOAMÉRICA maintains that heterosexuality is the creative design for humanity, and consequently considers other points of view outside of God's will. Exodus affirms that homosexual tendencies are one of many dysfunctions to which a fallen humanity is subject."¹²⁵ The description of homosexuality in terms of tendencies further serves to medicalize the condition and distance desire from identity, such that someone might be a "nongay" person (as Cohen suggested) with "homosexual tendencies."

Exodus differs from its co-actors in the pro-SOCE TAN in its heavy reliance on the miraculous intervention of Jesus Christ. The banner across the main page of the website begins with Exodus Latinoamérica's logo: an animation from behind of a man with a staff parting a sea. This allusion calls to mind the Biblical story of Moses, who guided his people out of slavery in Egypt with the help of God's miraculous intervention in parting the Red Sea. This is reminiscent of the imagery Cohen's book title evokes ("Coming Out"), and indicates that as the name of the ministry implies, the goal is to guide people *out* of bondage. The next scene in the banner shows a portrait of a pensive young man, with the words "Not through a method, but through a person: Jesus Christ." The following image is a young woman smiling, with the caption "Freedom from homosexuality through the transformative power of Jesus Christ." Finally the banner shows an excerpt from the Biblical verse 1 Corinthians 6:11, describing the process of being "washed, justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of

¹²⁵ Ibid.

our God.”¹²⁶ All of this language is heavily dependent on the role of the divine, such that the responsibility for freeing/washing/sanctifying people from their homosexuality rests heavily on God rather than the therapists.

EXODUS LATINOAMÉRICA believes that Christ offers the healing alternative to those with homosexual tendencies. Exodus affirms that there is redemption for homosexual people through a process in which sin is broken, and consequently, the individual is liberated to be able to know and experience their true identity in Christ and in the church. This process includes the freedom to be able to grow towards heterosexuality.¹²⁷

This description emphasizes the healing of brokenness, the breaking of wrongness, and the liberation of an individual. Any identity is framed as false in comparison with the “true identity in Christ,” which echoes other pro-SOCE actors’ affirmation of an individual’s right to self-determination (particularly when they self-determine to come out of homosexuality), as well as the differentiation between desire and identity. By relegating the responsibility for changing people to God’s will, Exodus is able to shirk criticism if its approach doesn’t work; it allows them to escape into the arguments that either the individual is not submitted to God’s will enough for him to change them, or because human beings cannot understand God’s will, his methods may not appear logical to us.

Despite some theological and linguistic differences, the rhetoric regarding homosexuality and SOCE is strikingly similar across these various international organizations. The International Healing Foundation is a self-described therapeutic

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

American organization that publishes in English. Courage Latino is a heavily Catholic Mexican organization that publishes entirely in Spanish but is linked to an American branch in Connecticut. Exodus Latinoamérica is also a Mexican branch of an American organization, which now has offices in Canada, Brazil, Australia, Taiwan, Mexico, and both Florida and Michigan. The similarities in language across these organizations indicate the information-sharing element that Keck and Sikkink describe as so important to the cohesiveness of a TAN. These transnationally linked organizations construct and address homosexuality similarly, countering the human rights discourses of their opponents by focusing on the compassionate healing of a broken human condition, and in turn deploying their own brand of rights-based rhetoric. This is not the only transnational network seeking to improve the human condition, however; it is to anti-SOCE actors that I now turn.

Transnational Talk: pro-LGBT, anti-SOCE

This section is dedicated to the examination of transnational campaigns launched in opposition to sexual orientation change efforts, or SOCE. Here I examine the “Cures that Kill” campaign sponsored by the International Day Against Homophobia coalition in conjunction with the Pan American Health Organization (IDAHO and PAHO) as a demonstration of the way the pro-LGBT TAN discusses reparative therapy and SOCE. These campaigns construct reparative therapy as a fundamentalist expression of homophobia, and homophobia as a public health threat. They invalidate the scientific validity of their opposition, thus elevating their own credibility. By casting the blame for the barriers to LGBT health on social attitudes and homophobia and linking SOCE to those attitudes these campaigns construct putting an end to SOCE as an urgent human rights matter.

The International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) commemorates the decision by the World Health Organization (WHO) on May 17, 1990, to remove homosexuality from the International Classifications of Diseases. This annual celebration also marks a wide range of transnational efforts to combat homophobia and anti-gay sentiment worldwide. With smaller beginnings in 2005, the committee of activists has since successfully expanded its network to encompass activism in over 80 different countries. In its 2012 report, IDAHO describes that in Latin America, it has widely been recognized as “an annual landmark for action.”¹²⁸ On the whole, IDAHO is designed to “provoke action....reinforce the visibility of the varied and often isolated efforts from activists all over the world...[and] to place this Day on the national calendar in the highest number of countries possible, and then to have it adopted at an international level.”¹²⁹ With this mission in mind, IDAHO truly meets all five criteria described by Keck and Sikkink in order to qualify as a transnational advocacy network: it is value-driven, morally rather than materially motivated, composed of international links between organizations (particularly NGOs), it takes action on behalf of a specific group of people, and is primarily designed to facilitate the exchange of information across borders. Therefore, the language it uses in its transnational campaign efforts is quintessentially the type of transnational talk that characterizes the pro-LGBT TAN.

¹²⁸ International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. *IDAHO Annual Report 2012*. 2012: 2.

¹²⁹ IDAHO. “What are the practical objectives of this day?” Web. Accessed March 25, 2013. <http://www.dayagainsthomophobia.org/What-are-the-practical-objectives,46>.

In 2012, the IDAHO committee launched a new campaign entitled “Cures that Kill,” with resources in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, designed to “combat the so-called “reparative therapies,” which are promoted throughout the region [Latin America and the Caribbean] by dogmatic religious groups.”¹³⁰ With allied organizations from 12 Latin American countries, this campaign consists of a variety of internet-based awareness raising efforts. These include a multi-lingual Facebook page with links to various IDAHO pages, news sources, and information about reparative therapies worldwide. The online petition, titled “Cures That Kill: A Life Without Discrimination is a Basic Human Right,” appears on the IDAHO website, with links to both the “short” and “full” versions. The title of the campaign implies a drastic condemnation of reparative therapy, taking the concern over human rights violations in conjunction with re-orientation efforts a step further than other actors in the TAN. Though violence and abuse have been documented on a large scale as a result of these reparative therapies, for example in Ecuador, the language of this campaign constructs connections between these therapies and death, heightening the urgency of its purpose.



This petition is carefully constructed; it begins by introducing the history of IDAHO, and asserting that “the WHO and the international human rights system oppose all kinds of treatments aimed at ‘curing’ homosexuality.”¹³¹ This sets the stage for the

¹³⁰ IDAHO Annual Report 2012: 5.

¹³¹ IDAHO. “Cures That Kill: A Life Without Discrimination is a Basic Human Right. A Pan-Latin American Campaign Against “Reparative” Therapies.” Full version. Web. Accessed March 25, 2013. http://www.dayagainsthomophobia.org/IMG/pdf/LAC_appeal_eng_long.pdf.

rest of the petition as representative of the standards and expectations of the international community, thereby leveraging the more LGBT-friendly international scene to put pressure on less friendly local actors. This in itself reflects some of the principles that underlie the boomerang effect: closed political opportunities in local settings are more likely to change with external international moral pressures. The petition goes on to call attention to the reports of attempts to “cure” homosexuality all across Latin America and the Caribbean. This petition, like the other three pro-LGBT petitions I examine within my Ecuador case study, deploys a series of un-sourced quotations that serve to problematize the pseudo-medical context within which these cure efforts take place. It challenges that people are “locked up in so called ‘psychiatric wards’ endorsed and/or managed by certain religious institutions or even public ones, in order to be ‘cured’,” and that in reference to non-normative sexualities, these institutions “endorse them as a ‘diversion of personality’ that may be ‘corrected’ through pardon and religious beliefs, accompanied with punishment, anguish and psychological and physical torture.”¹³²

Having laid the groundwork for the gravity of the situation, and subtly invalidated the arguments of the opponents using quotations to emphasize the foolishness of their perspective, the petition then turns back to the urgency of the matter. The following paragraph begins with the statement “Unable to ‘cure’ their desire, LGBT people in many cases...”¹³³ This assumption would go practically unnoticed by a reader who has made the same conclusion about the nature of sexuality as immutable, and it acts as a foundational block for the argument that the constant push to achieve the impossible—that is, change one’s sexuality or gender identity—can be so negative as to lead to

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

suicide. Undoubtedly, this argument has been deployed in this context because it is designed for individuals and organizations that already support the efforts of IDAHO and other pro-LGBT activists; this petition does not exist to convince the opposition to change its perspective, but to rally existing international support.

In order to pique the international community's interest, the petition concentrates its framing around the issue of "preventable deaths, to which the State must pay attention and take preventive measures."¹³⁴ The assertion of homosexuality as unnatural and changeable not only has a negative effect on the individual's mental health, but also fosters a social environment that accepts and perpetuates violence against these individuals. The petition doesn't indicate any statistics or evidence of deaths directly occurring as a result of reparative therapies, but instead attempts to frame reparative therapy as an underlying cause of the wider problem of homophobia. This clearly demonstrates that IDAHO's vision of pro-LGBT transnational activism revolves around the elimination of root causes of homophobia, rather than a simple treatment of its symptoms.

The next section of the petition shifts the reader's attention back to the issue framed as one of basic human rights, a discourse that is no stranger to the transnational LGBT movement. Homosexuality and transsexualism are described here as manifestations of human diversity which are "protected by the principles of liberty, equality, and human dignity enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments."¹³⁵ This recalls the debate within existing scholarship regarding the application of human rights language to sexuality, and furthermore

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

exemplifies the Westernized language that is deployed here on behalf of—but not by—LGBT Latin Americans. The petition, having called to mind the rich history of LGBT human rights arguments, then moves on to assert the values of secularism: “Still, besides being systematically spread in religious spaces, intolerant fundamentalist discourses are increasingly spilling over into spaces where the principle of secularism should prevail...”¹³⁶ The liberal and Western value placed on the separation of church and state here may be seen as problematic, and further emphasizes that the audience to which this petition appeals is largely one that already shares the values of the authors. This isn’t to discount the weight of secularism in some Latin American nations; the vehement concern about the involvement of the Mexican government in the funding of “Camino a la Castidad” exemplifies the value of the separation of church and state to many Mexican citizens. Ecuador’s new Constitution, ratified in 2008, establishes the nation as “constitutional, rights and justice-based, social, democratic, sovereign, independent, unitary, intercultural, plurinational and secular.”¹³⁷ However, religious discourse’s integration in Latin American society takes an indisputably different shape than it does in the United States or European nations, and the type of objective secularism described here by IDAHO seems idealistic at best. It argues that religious discourse, as it spills over into the public sphere, is “thus influencing the decisions that should be informed by wide scientific consensus and treaties and agreements signed by the States at the international, national, and local levels, rather than by the sacred books of any religion...”¹³⁸ This

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Marcos, Natalia and Tatiana Cordero. “Situation of Lesbian and Trans Women in Ecuador, Shadow Report” Taller de Comunicación Mujer and IGLHRC. September 2009: 3.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

assertion attempts to prioritize internationally recognized norms over any other ideological differences, to further lend legitimacy to its cause, a common tactic TANs use to get a leg up on their opponents.¹³⁹ The IDAHO petition has so far represented itself as merely a reflection of the existing human rights and democratic norms that, it argues, should be authoritative. Unfortunately for IDAHO, extricating political ideology from its religious and religio-cultural roots, or exchanging the authority of cultural history and national sovereignty for international norms is not a cut-and-dry process.

The paragraph following this call to secularism is dedicated to the inclusion and affirmation of religious voices, so long as they are acting in concert with IDAHO's efforts to promote "life, equality, dignity, and diversity, and to refrain from promoting lesbophobia, homophobia, and transphobia."¹⁴⁰ This petition therefore serves a second purpose, which is to characterize what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in terms of religious actors' participation in the debate regarding LGBT rights. As an implicitly self-proclaimed authority on the international norms that relate to sexuality issues, IDAHO has attempted to set the stage for what the international community will tolerate from religious voices.

The petition finishes by making two demands, one urge, and one request. It demands that Latin American and Caribbean nations adhere to secularism, by which it appears to mean a removal of public funding for private religious endeavors such as reparative therapy, and the revocation of public support and funding from any such organizations. It demands that reparative therapies and their practitioners be removed

¹³⁹ Bob 2012: Chapter 2. See especially the section entitled "Persuasion—and Dissuasion."

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

from publically provided health care services, at both the local and national levels. It urges private donors to explicitly oppose reparative therapies and to require this explicit opposition from any grant-seeking organizations. Finally, it requests the condemnation of the *discourse* that perpetuates the acceptance and validity of reparative therapies.¹⁴¹ This recognition of the power of discourse in upholding a normative status quo indicates that IDAHO is campaigning against a largely discursive phenomenon: homophobia. It furthermore reveals that the battle against homophobia—of which reparative therapy is framed here as both a symptom and a cause—takes place at the discursive level. IDAHO's careful construction of the problem as a deadly violation of internationally recognized norms reveals the elements of its rhetorical arsenal as it fights for LGBT rights worldwide.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) functions as the regional branch of the WHO for the Americas, as well as the world's oldest international public health agency, dating back to 1902. In conjunction with the IDAHO campaign, on May 17, 2012, PAHO released a statement regarding reparative therapies for homosexuality. As a public health organization, this publication predictably addresses the issue of reparative therapy in largely health related terms. The brief position paper, titled "'Cures' For an Illness that Does Not Exist: Purported therapies aimed at changing sexual orientation lack medical justification and are ethically unacceptable," addresses the issues of homosexuality, homophobia, sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) such as reparative therapy, and makes recommendations to various institutions in addressing SOCE.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Pan American Health Organization, "'Cures' For an Illness that Does Not Exist: Purported therapies aimed at changing sexual orientation lack medical justification and

This paper, similarly to IDAHO's "Cures that Kill" campaign, presents homophobia, rather than homosexuality, as the true threat to public health. Homophobia is presented in this report as "based on intolerance resulting from blind fanaticism as well as pseudo-scientific views that regard non-heterosexual and non-procreative sexual behavior as 'deviation' or the result of a 'developmental defect.'"¹⁴³ Similarly to the Cohen's argument in his book, the invalidation of the opposition on the grounds of scientific inaccuracy or lack of evidence is a critical tool to assert one's own credibility. In this instance, PAHO relegates the conservative religious ideology of the "natural family" as a heterosexual and procreative unit to the derogatory category of "blind fanaticism." Aside from this subtle dismissal of the religious, PAHO asserts its criticism of the medical science behind reparative therapy on several different levels: on the grounds of lack of evidence/justification, ineffectiveness, and the violation of medical norms and ethics, accompanied in some instances by human rights violations (e.g. in Ecuador).

By calling on the "perspective of professional ethics and human rights protected by regional and universal treaties and conventions," the report condemns the "clandestine manner" in which these reparative therapies are frequently enacted. As the international medical community has characterized homosexuality as a "natural and non-pathological variation" of human sexuality,¹⁴⁴ the PAHO argues that reparative therapies or SOCE "lack medical justification" because "in none of its individual manifestations does

are ethically unacceptable." Web. Last Modified May 15, 2012. Accessed March 26, 2013.

http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=17703.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 1.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, American Psychological Association. "Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality."

homosexuality constitute a disorder or an illness, and therefore it requires no cure.”¹⁴⁵ A further critique of the practice challenges the effectiveness of the therapy, suggesting that there is “no scientific evidence for the effectiveness of sexual re-orientation efforts.”¹⁴⁶ This argument attempts to conclude that because no evidence proves the effectiveness of SOCE, they must therefore be ineffective, a similar logical construction to that of Cohen’s dismissal of immutability. Furthermore, it posits that though it may be possible to conduct a change in behavior, this does not constitute a change in sexual orientation, because “the orientation itself generally appears as an integral personal characteristic that cannot be changed.”¹⁴⁷ The argument over the mutability of orientation has long taken center stage in the conflict between pro-LGBT and pro-family forces; as I have explored, Richard Cohen’s key assertion is that “change is possible.”¹⁴⁸

Apart from unjustified and ineffective, PAHO also argues that reparative therapies are or can be harmful, resulting in such effects as “depression, anxiety, insomnia, feelings of guilt and shame, and even suicidal ideation and behaviors.” If this is indeed the case, the report asserts, this type of treatment “constitutes a violation of the first principle of medical ethics: ‘first, do no harm.’” Instances such as those in Ecuador and Mexico, in which individuals are enrolled against their will in these programs and in some cases even abused, further constitute “threats to the right of personal autonomy and to personal integrity,” and even “violate the dignity and human rights of the affected persons.”¹⁴⁹ Finally, having presented these arguments, the PAHO report returns to its

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 1.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 2.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 2.

¹⁴⁸ Cohen 2006: Preface.

¹⁴⁹ Pan American Health Organization, ““Cures for an Illness that Does Not Exist”: 2.

invalidation of the scientific validity of the reparative therapists' perspective: "Health professionals who offer 'reparative therapies' align themselves with social prejudices and reflect a stark ignorance in matters of sexuality and sexual health."¹⁵⁰ The accusations of ignorance and ideological prejudice are particularly biting coming from an organization whose image as a public health institution lend it credibility on the grounds of its internationally recognized scientific objectivity.

By framing these therapies first as violators of international scientific norms, then of medical ethics, and finally of basic human rights, the PAHO problematizes reparative therapies from various different angles. It builds an image of the therapies carefully; at the very least, they are ineffective and unjustified, and at the very worst, harmful and illegal. By challenging the scientific validity of its opponents' position, to the point of describing it as "pseudo-scientific," it deals a blow to the very foundation of their therapy as a medical and scientific approach to human mental health. Finally, the report offers recommendations to governments, educational institutions, professional associations, the media, and civil society in terms of navigating the issue of reparative therapy. The recommendations overwhelmingly request that these various institutions respond to homophobia as a threat to public health, remaining vigilant and opposed to any practice or promotion of reparative therapy. These recommendations request the use of sanctions against any reparative therapy, and the dissemination of information regarding the diversity of sexual expression and the dignity of all individuals regardless of their sexuality. PAHO adeptly reframes the issue from one regarding sexual orientation to one regarding basic human dignity and health. This publication focuses on tangible sources of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 2.

damage done to individuals with non-normative sexualities, shifting the target of blame from “deviant” sexualities to negative social attitudes *about* sexuality, namely homophobia. This publication by PAHO contributes to the transnational reframing of reparative therapy, a discourse with which the pro-family TAN will undoubtedly have to engage in response. The International Healing Foundation’s recent petition in favor of access to SOCE reflects one way this response is beginning to emerge.

Ecuador

For over a decade in Ecuador, lesbians and trans* women have been forcibly hospitalized and even abused, raped, and tortured, in the name of “de-homosexualization.” At least some of these clinics, of which there are estimated to be over 200, are licensed by the state as rehabilitation clinics for drug and alcohol addictions. However, the Taller de Comunicación Mujer, (Women’s Communication Workshop) in conjunction with the local activist groups Artikulación Esporádika in Quito, Ecuador, have asserted that as of 2011 over 50% of these clinics “don’t have a permit, don’t register information about their legal status, and furthermore present problems of overcrowding, lack of services, and reports have been made of various cases of physical, psychological, and sexual mistreatment, on top of forced medicalization, involuntary internment, improper deprivation of freedom and even strangulation” (my translation).¹⁵¹

In 2008 the Ecuadorian government adopted a new constitution that provided for the protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, with the consequence of up to three years in prison as punishment for any discriminatory practices.¹⁵² However, despite this legal protection, women are still enrolled in or committed to these clinics, usually against their will. Families and husbands have the

¹⁵¹ Taller de Comunicación Mujer. “Violación de Derechos a Mujeres Lesbianas Persiste en Ecuador: Datos Alarmantes en Torno a Clínicas de Rehabilitación.” TCMujer.org, Publicaciones. Web. Accessed March 6, 2013.

¹⁵² Article 212.6 of the Penal Code, as quoted in Marcos, Natalia and Tatiana Cordero. “Situación de las mujeres lesbianas en Ecuador: Pacto Internacional de Derechos Civiles y Políticas, Informe Sombra.” Taller de Comunicación Mujer. Web. September 2009. Accessed March 6, 2013, 4.

power to send these women to these dangerous and illegal clinics because “the heterosexual order...[is] protected by its social legitimacy.”¹⁵³

It is clear that in the Ecuadorian case, the obstacle to equality and the achievement of basic human rights protections for LGBT individuals is not the state itself, though institutional indifference to these egregious abuses certainly poses a problem. Though the Ministry of Public Health and other state institutions carry the burden of negligence, the barriers to equality here are at least in some measure the actions of family members and professional clinic staff, which are justified by a deeply entrenched heteronormative and homophobic social structure.¹⁵⁴ The underlying demand for the “de-homosexualization” services calls for an explanation. Perhaps it grows out of the nation’s Catholic influence, rooted in a worldview similar to that of the American Christian Right which depends on the “natural family” as the fundamental social unit and homosexuality therefore as a deviation from God-ordained human heterosexuality.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps it demonstrates a growing presence and acceptance of LGBT identities; with a larger population of individuals identifying as “gay” in a society that is uncomfortable with homosexuality for whatever reason, tension forms and some families may feel the need to take action. The explanation for the demand for these clinics is particularly elusive due to their overwhelmingly underground nature. If indeed over half of them are operating illegally, calling attention to themselves via publications and fiery unconstitutional rhetoric certainly would not further their goals of sexual re-orientation. Whatever the case may

¹⁵³ Marcos, Natalia and Tatiana Cordero. “Situation of Lesbian and Trans Women in Ecuador, Shadow Report” Taller de Comunicación Mujer and IGLHRC. September 2009, 7.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p 11.

¹⁵⁵ See Buss and Herman 2003: Introduction.

be, the noticeable absence of conservative and Christian discourse on the topic stands out. To fully understand this facet of the problem undoubtedly requires further research about these elusive clinics themselves.

In response to growing international media attention focused on this phenomenon, at the end of 2011 a collective of transnational LGBT activist organizations—including AllOut.org and Change.org—launched a campaign which obtained over 178,000 signatures in online petitions that would later be delivered to President Rafael Correa and the Minister of Public Health, David Chiriboga. Within a matter of months Chiriboga stepped down, allegedly as a result of his failing healthcare system. His replacement, Carina Vance Mafla, is an out lesbian and former director of local gay rights activist group, Fundación Causana. Upon assuming office toward the end of January of 2012, many activists expected the closure of the abusive de-homosexualization camps would be one of her top priorities, due to her history of activism for the cause.¹⁵⁶ The international attention drawn to the clinics was effective enough to get the issue a spot in the US State Department’s 2011 report on the status of human rights in Ecuador, under a section titled “Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.”¹⁵⁷

What is it about this issue that attracted such widespread attention from the international community of LGBT rights activists? And why now, when the local coalition of activists in Ecuador has been working on the problem for over ten years?

¹⁵⁶ Duque, Andrés. “Ecuador: Lesbian who led fight against ‘gay conversion’ clinics appointed to Presidential Cabinet.” Blabbeando. Web. Last modified January 23, 2012. Accessed March 6, 2013.

¹⁵⁷ United States State Department. “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Ecuador.” Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Web. Accessed March 27 2013. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186722.pdf>.

This sudden and dramatic success in terms of attracting attention can likely be attributed to a variety of factors. Primarily, political opportunity structures in the international sphere have been opening steadily for LGBT causes. This growing support and acceptance in Western nations for the rights of individuals with non-normative sexualities makes appealing to the international sphere a much more effective tactic today than it would have been at any point in the past. Secondly, the issue was framed dramatically in terms of human rights violations. A further direction for future research would include an examination of this domestic coalition of feminists and the discourse they have used over time, in order to examine if/how it has evolved. Regardless of whether or not it has changed, however, this human rights frame resonated strongly with the international community. This demonstrates the shrewdness of the LGBT movement as a whole in adopting this frame, as it clearly attracted more attention internationally than the Mexico case, which deals more with conversion therapy and less with human rights issues.

After Mafla's appointment, on behalf of lesbian and trans* Ecuadorian women, the transnational advocacy networks announced "victory" in the closures of over 30 of these "cure the gay" clinics.¹⁵⁸ However, with over one hundred clinics left in operation and no formal charges pressed against those responsible, this victory is incomplete at best. In fact, this declaration of victory works more as a tactic for the transnational LGBT network to rally supporters and foster enthusiasm than it does to actually describe or create change in Ecuador. The strategic use of victory rhetoric, rather than being a

¹⁵⁸ AllOut.org. "Victory! 'Cure the Gays' Clinics Shut Down in Ecuador." Web. Last modified January 24, 2012. Accessed March 6, 2013. See also Fetterhoff, Christina. "Shutting Down the Clinics that 'Cure Homosexuality' in Ecuador." The Human Rights Brief. Web. Last modified Nov 28, 2011. Accessed March 6, 2013.

definitive end to a struggle, is in actuality one of the forms of its continuation.¹⁵⁹

Unfortunately, international actors, satisfied with victory, have lifted their pressure and attention to the issue. The incompleteness of this victory also demands explanation: what is stopping the Ecuadorian government from taking further action? Perhaps we are simply examining this problem in the middle of the socialization of an international norm, and its adoption of these human rights for LGBT citizens is thus far too incomplete to result in consistent protective behavior without the need for external pressure.¹⁶⁰

The discourse available for analysis in this case is heavily concentrated in activist publications, blog posts, and online news sources. Many of these sources employ notably pro-gay or human rights centered discourses, criticizing the inhumanity and illegality of the clinics. Discourse from the clinic directors or sponsors themselves is sparse and often reported strictly through the lens of the pro-gay publications. However, this lack of conservative or opposing discourse calls attention to the underlying and accepted nature of norms that require no reiteration or publication. The face of the transnational conservative anti-gay network takes different forms in different contexts; it would appear that in Ecuador it is sufficient for the network to leave its cause in the hands of local homophobia and Catholic ideology.

The Ecuador case perfectly exemplifies the domestic paradox of state legal protection but de facto abuse of rights. The case is also a poster child for the boomerang pattern illustrated by Keck and Sikkink, represented in the nomination and appointment of Carina Mafla as a response to drastic international pressure. However, the

¹⁵⁹ Bob 2012: Chapter 2.

¹⁶⁰ Risse, Thomas, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink. *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*. (Cambridge: New York: Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 20-31.

complications to this model are also apparent in the incompleteness of the clinic closures; though the boomerang model may have been an effective tool in removing explicit state barriers to gay rights, it did not result in the closure of all of the clinics, nor any juridical consequences for the perpetrators of these human rights violations. The international pressure also may have had little or no effect on public opinion, thereby not altering the systemic social structures of homophobia and heteronormativity that justify the clinics' existence.

Petition Presentation

In this section, I will be examining web publications made by the transnational LGBT advocacy network (composed of Change.org, AllOut.org, and CredoAction). The petitions published online by Change.org, AllOut.org, and CredoAction are available to a transnational audience simply by their online presence and multi-lingual availability. The Internet is becoming increasingly accessible; with low-priced public Internet kiosks and cybercafés all over many urban settings, accessibility to web resources is becoming more and more prevalent. This isn't the case worldwide, or necessarily in rural settings, but it does indicate the increasing availability of the pro-LGBT TAN's discourse to potential local activists. These petitions, most of which are available in Spanish, all sport similar language and arguments with varying degrees of intensity. This section reveals transnational activists' awareness of political opportunities available to them, their own use of the boomerang, their subtle attribution of rhetoric to opponents, and their dependence on the human rights frame for legitimacy. These petitions have largely avoided the issue of homophobia, focusing instead on the blatant violations of rights that will garner the most support internationally. However, this international advocacy effort

via online petitions is not without its traces of imperialism, which some advocacy organizations navigate better than others.

AllOut, an international activist organization dedicated specifically to LGBT issues, has two sites discussing the rehab centers for lesbians. One is found on the social media and blogging site Tumblr, and the other on its website archived as one of the many campaigns the group has taken on.¹⁶¹ The Tumblr page, in English, points readers to the main petition, of which versions are available in Spanish, Portuguese, and French. The presence of AllOut on social media sites including Tumblr, Twitter, and YouTube recalls Sidney Tarrow's reference to internationalism as a contributing factor to the expanding directions that political opportunities take as the face of our social sphere changes with technological advances. These particular platforms with which AllOut has elected to present itself also speak to the audience to which the campaigns appeal: tech-savvy individuals, bloggers, and folks who get at least some measure of their information via the Internet. On both AllOut sites dedicated to these clinics in Ecuador, the organization invites the reader to appeal directly to President Rafael Correa to shut down the clinics. The sites curiously call attention to their use of the boomerang effect, indicating that Correa has "staked his reputation on a series of progressive positions" and if he "knows the international community is watching closely, he'll be pushed to act." They finish their urge to action by asserting, in bold: "President Correa needs to know that international

¹⁶¹ AllOut.org. "Lesbians held captive in Ecuador—you can help." Web. Last modified November 17, 2011. Accessed March 20, 2013. <http://alloutorg.tumblr.com/post/12930520116>; AllOut.org. "Victory! 'Cure the Gays' Clinics Shut Down in Ecuador." Web. Last modified January 24, 2012. Accessed March 6, 2013. <http://www.allout.org/ecuadorclinics>.

pressure is building right now, and that ignoring the issue won't make it go away.”¹⁶²

This not only calls attention to the apparently unquestioned effectiveness of the boomerang model in motivating policy change, but also serves to legitimate the medium of petitions as a powerful tool to harness international public opinion for tangible change. As a very global organization, AllOut mediates the risk of coming off as an imperialist force imposing its policies upon Ecuador by presenting itself as “tapping into the unprecedented possibilities for global people power that new social media technologies allow...building a truly global community able to respond to moments of crisis and opportunity, to advance the lives and freedoms of LGBT people everywhere.”¹⁶³ By minimizing its origins in the US and presenting itself as global and democratic, AllOut attempts to dodge what could easily be seen and rejected as Western imperialism.

Both AllOut sites stress the “horrific” nature of the torture taking place at these clinics, describing that “hundreds of illegal clinics in Ecuador are holding young women captive to be raped, tortured, starved, and beaten...” These publications take advantage of every problematic detail of the situation: the illegal status of the clinics, the violence of the treatment, and the measures in the Ecuadorian constitution which protect LGBT folks against discrimination, provide civil unions for same sex couples, and condemn violence against women. The emphasis on the gap between legal policy and government action in practice serves as an impetus for action: “But despite the legal protections on the books, these dangerous clinics are falling through the cracks.”¹⁶⁴ By setting the scene carefully, AllOut was able to paint a picture of an outrageous and urgent situation of the violations

¹⁶² “Victory! “Cure the Gays” Clinics Shut Down in Ecuador.” AllOut.org 2011.

¹⁶³ AllOut.org. “About: What We Do.” Accessed March 30, 2013.
<https://www.allout.org/en/about>.

¹⁶⁴ “Lesbians held captive in Ecuador—you can help.” AllOut on Tumblr 2011.

of basic human rights of young Ecuadorian women for what appears to be no good reason.

In order to problematize the motivations of the clinic directors and family members who subject these apparently innocent women to such treatment, AllOut deploys an intentionally contentious series of quotations that are implicitly attributed to the clinic representatives. These sites describe that these women are being abused by ‘health care professionals,’ who think they are ‘sick,’ that homosexuality is an ‘illness,’ and wish to have them ‘quarantined’ in ‘gay cure’ clinics in order to ‘cure the gay away.’¹⁶⁵ However, AllOut never cites these quotations as derived from the clinics they are accusing. The rhetoric of illness, cures, and health care thematically conforms to the accusation that most of these clinics are drug- and alcohol-addiction rehabilitation clinics gone wrong, but places an implicit emphasis on the homophobic aspect of their services. This subtle tactic of creating a discourse that appears representative of the opposition but remains ambiguous in origin allows pro-LGBT activists to paint their opponents as misguided, abusive, pseudo-medical homophobes. Furthermore, AllOut constructs the problem in a way that the burden of responsibility remains on the clinic directors and politicians who, through negligence and inaction, allow the clinics to remain open. The Tumblr site describes that “Some confused parents are forcing their young people to be ‘quarantined’ in these dangerous clinics, but the fact remains: they are illegal.”¹⁶⁶ The impetus for action here rests on the state’s ability to shut the clinics down altogether because of their illegal status, rather than resting on legislating against parents’ ability to

¹⁶⁵ Phrases and words originally in quotations from “Lesbians held captive in Ecuador—you can help.” “Victory! “Cure the Gays” Clinics Shut Down in Ecuador.” AllOut.org 2011.

¹⁶⁶ “Lesbians held captive in Ecuador—you can help.” AllOut on Tumblr 2011.

enroll their children in these clinics. This sentence alone deploys several different discursive approaches: that of the medical illegitimacy of the clinics, the threats to human rights that they pose, their violation of local laws, and the confusion of parents who still send their kids there. The parents aren't described as 'confused,' in quotation marks, the way the clinic staff is framed as 'health care professionals.' The absence of the quotation tactic in describing the parents' role in the issue demonstrates AllOut's awareness both of the political opportunity structures available to it and the intimate relationship between its framing and its navigation of them. It has apparently set its sights on international outrage at the clinics existence as a more effective short-term tactic to end these tortures than combating homophobia locally to stop parents from sending their kids to be cured. Here, AllOut compounds as many different complaints against these clinics as possible, simultaneously appealing to a wide audience with its varying frames and discursively constructing multiple reasons for an individual to sign their petition.



Photo credit: Credo Action petition 2011

Credo Action is a web platform designed by the for-profit phone service provider Working Assets, which donates portions of its profits to a variety of progressive causes and nonprofit groups. The Credo Action website acts as a networking tool for activists to mobilize and inform one another on various progressive issues.¹⁶⁷ The

¹⁶⁷ Working Assets. "About Working Assets," Web. Accessed March 23, 2013, <http://www.workingassets.com/About.aspx>.

issue of the Ecuadorian de-homosexualization clinics was one of the many campaigns Credo Action got involved with in 2011. They, like AllOut and Change.org, posted an online petition calling to “stop this unconscionable treatment of innocent women.”¹⁶⁸ This petition was directed at the Minister of Public Health at the time, David Chiriboga, and it asserted that he had “the ability to investigate and shut down the remaining 207 clinics”.¹⁶⁹ Like the petition from AllOut, Credo also explicitly embraces its reliance upon the boomerang effect: “He needs to know that the eyes of the international community are on Ecuador, and that we won't stop pressuring him until the government upholds the protections guaranteed in the Constitution and shuts down every one of the remaining clinics.”¹⁷⁰ It further highlights the government's action to shut down the “small handful” of clinics as proof of its sensitivity to international pressure, and therefore presents its petition in a positive, hopeful light. This transnational organizing and expression of outrage is the kind of tool that has had a demonstrated impact on Ecuador in the past, and therefore has hope for effecting future policy change. The petition emphasizes that Credo, too, depends on the subtle tactic of attributing discourse to its opponents, particularly those terms that, left unchallenged, would lend their actions medical legitimacy. Therefore, they call for activists to get involved, because “international pressure could help prioritize this issue for the government of Ecuador and help shut down these so-called ‘clinics.’” The petition goes on to mention the

¹⁶⁸ Credo Action. “Stop the rape and torture of lesbians in Ecuador.” Working Assets. Web. Accessed March 23, 2013. http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/ecuador_torture/.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

unacceptable behavior of one victim's 'doctors,' serving to convey a general disdain for the medical façade the clinics employ to disguise something much more sinister.¹⁷¹

Unfortunately, because Credo is a US based organization, this language can easily come off as invasive and foreign. The imposition of foreign desires upon Ecuadorian government officials is not without its imperialist undertones. Credo, unlike AllOut, is distinctly American and run by a for-profit corporation, which undoubtedly could raise concerns regarding the cultural imperialism of the US upon its less wealthy neighbors. Though the unity on this issue amongst the transnational advocates for LGBT rights softens the impression of flat-out Western imperialist force, wariness on the part of Ecuadorians would not be surprising.¹⁷²

Credo Action's petition differs slightly from AllOut's in that it employs a much more charged rhetoric. The petition describes the situation in terms that include the following: "shocking," "systematic brutalization," "tacit approval of the government," "barbaric practice of holding women against their will and torturing them because of their sexual orientation," "commit mass human rights violations against innocent women every day."¹⁷³ This language paints the picture of a government sanctioned, regular, ongoing, violent, uncivilized state of affairs. It carefully categorizes the abuse as a "practice," leaving no space to reduce the victims' experiences as isolated or unrelated events. The underlying appeal to the human rights of innocent women is made stronger by the petition's emphasis on the brutality of the acts committed against them; by focusing on

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² I am indebted to Dr. Bayard de Volo for this point.

¹⁷³ Credo Action. "Stop the rape and torture of lesbians in Ecuador."

the issues of being “held captive, raped, tortured, starved, and beaten,”¹⁷⁴ Credo somewhat sidesteps the underlying issue of whether or not it’s permissible or even possible to re-orient a person’s sexuality. This, too, demonstrates a shrewd awareness of the political opportunity structures in Ecuador: apparently Credo has decided that basic human rights will resonate much better both internationally and locally than attempting to combat homophobia on an ideological level. The petitions don’t call for an end to reparative therapy, but the closure of what has been painted as hundreds of illegal, violent, and criminal fake clinics. This framing of the issue acts at odds with its opponents’ framing without directly engaging with their ideology. Organizations like Exodus International and Richard Cohen’s International Healing Fund work hard to validate the use of reparative therapy as a tool *for* LGBT folks; these petitions work hard to frame them as violating their basic human rights and as medically faulty.

Change.org then represents the third and final collaborator in the online, transnational pro-LGBT activist coalition. Their online petition, unlike Credo Action, includes a translation of the petition into Spanish. The differences between the Spanish and English versions of the petition are negligible, except for a few unavoidable wording changes due to translation, so my analysis is based on the English version. It also contains a list of all of the Ecuadorian politicians to whom the petition was delivered. Originally directed to David Chiriboga, the petition was ultimately delivered with over 113,000 signatures from supporters worldwide to Chiriboga, as well as President Correa, the State Finance Secretary, and the Minister of Foreign Relations, among other governmental departments in Ecuador. Aside from a title addressing the petition to the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Ecuadorian Minister of Health, the body of the petition makes no mention of the role of international pressure in inspiring policy change. Rather than use the boomerang effect as an appeal to the effectiveness of the petition, Change.org uses a different tactic. It appeals to the personal details of one woman who escaped from one of these clinics, Paola Ziritti. The disturbing description of her experience of abuse is followed by a question she poses: “The closure of the first clinics by the government is good, but not good enough. Why is the clinic where I suffered still open?”¹⁷⁵ By personalizing the experience, Change.org attains a similar effect to that of Credo Action’s petition: focusing the issue on the violation of an individual’s basic rights and away from the moral question of reparative therapy and homosexuality on the whole.

The Change.org petition, compared to its sister petitions, is unique in its embodiment of the boomerang effect. Authored by Fundación Causana, an Ecuadorian human rights group, the petition truly represents an appeal from a local group blocked by its unfriendly government in achieving change. In this sense, this site’s actions perfectly exemplify a local group turning to the international sphere, and then returning to its state armed with international backing. This, too, sets Change.org apart from its collaborators in that it does not carry with it the threat of Western imperialism. In fact, as this website declared in January of 2012, ten years of campaigning and the thousands of signatures on the petition finally achieved change: “Now the Ecuadorian government is working hand in hand with Fundación Causana to eradicate these clinics from Ecuador, free the women

¹⁷⁵ Change.org. “Ecuador Minister of Health: Close remaining ex-gay torture clinics in Ecuador.” *Change.org*. Web. Jan 2012. Accessed March 6, 2013. <http://www.change.org/petitions/ecuador-minister-of-health-close-remaining-ex-gay-torture-clinics-in-ecuador>.

trapped inside, and launch a national public awareness campaign to fight homophobia.”¹⁷⁶

These activist coalitions may have declared “victory” upon the closure of the first thirty or so clinics in Ecuador, but as the more recent IDAHO and PAHO campaigns against reparative therapy have demonstrated, the transnational activism did anything but stop at “victory.”

Local Language

Though Fundación Causana was a major driving force behind attaining the much-needed international publicity for the situation of lesbians in Ecuador, it did not act alone as a local advocate for LGBT rights. The *Taller de Comunicación Mujer* (TCM, Women’s Communication Workshop), based in Quito, published a series of briefs and press releases regarding the issue of the de-homosexualization clinics. The International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) later released a version of the “Shadow Report on the Situation of Lesbian and Trans Women in Ecuador” in English. I now turn to this report as the transnational LGBT movement’s most academic and well-documented source of information on the issue of the de-homosexualization of lesbians, in order to examine the discourse used in its presentation. Much of the report consists of direct quotations of the Ecuadorian Political Constitution of 2008, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and testimonies of victims of the crimes perpetrated in de-homosexualization clinics. Though the report encompasses other instances of abuse and discrimination against lesbian and trans women in Ecuador aside from the cure clinics, I will not be examining those violations in this paper. I will

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

therefore be engaging with the elements of the report that comment on, analyze, or assess the primary sources that pertain to the clinics.

The structure of the discussion begins with a summary of the existing legal protections for LGBT individuals in Ecuador, particularly as established in the most recent Constitution of 2008. It also examines the relevant provisions for human rights as established in various articles in the ICCPR, a human rights treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966—with 74 signatories, including Ecuador, and 167 parties total. The report describes that the problem that Ecuador faces is “how to translate and apply the constitutional norm in secondary laws, rights protection mechanisms and strategies that allow for punishing and transforming discriminatory and violent practices.”¹⁷⁷ In order to further establish this groundwork, the report lays out the relevant sections of the Constitution and victims’ testimony that clearly demonstrates their rights violations. The victims describe: “the clinics treat homosexuality as ‘behavioural disorders’ and ‘addictions’.”¹⁷⁸ The language deployed by the online petitions disseminated by Change.org, AllOut, and Credo Action and attributed implicitly to the clinics is notably absent in the victims’ descriptions of the clinics’ treatment of their sexuality. Terms like ‘cure,’ ‘cure the gay away,’ and ‘quarantine’ do not appear at all in the victims’ testimony. The authors of the shadow report employ a similar set of terms, however:

Families are enabled to interfere with these women’s lives, ‘for their own good.’ The perspective that understands heterosexuality as the norm

¹⁷⁷ Marcos, Natalia and Tatiana Cordero. “Situation of Lesbian and Trans Women in Ecuador, Shadow Report” Taller de Comunicación Mujer and IGLHRC. September 2009: 3.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 6.

allows for the implementation of practices aimed at ‘curing deviants’. The underlying assumption is that homosexuality or (non conventional) gender identities are ‘illnesses’ or ‘vices’.¹⁷⁹

The language used by these authors constructs an image of a social attitude towards homosexuality, perpetuated by heteronormativity, which justifies the efforts of these clinics to attempt to de-homosexualize their patients. This demonization of homophobia reflects the attitudes of the PAHO in framing homophobic social attitudes as the real public health threat. For example, the corrective rapes and other abuses documented in these clinics are described as “systematic ways to punish lesbian women for challenging social and gender norms through their sexual preferences and/or gender identity.”¹⁸⁰ The underlying problem, as the situation is presented here, is therefore society’s need to control and punish women, rather than the women themselves:

Biological, heteronormative and binary discourses are still prevalent in different institutions (state, family, medical establishment, etc.) and they establish mechanisms for social disciplining in order to produce and reinforce the sexual and gender order. In this regard, torture and cruel treatment stand as normalization mechanisms...to increase control over their daughters’ sexuality; to transfer the punishment for sexual dissidents from the family’s responsibility to that of so-called health professionals; and to perpetuate women’s submission by physically bending and

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 7.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 8.

psychologically diminishing them in order to restore the heterosexual and patriarchal order that they have transgressed.¹⁸¹

By describing this process as an attempt to normalize the sexually non-normative women in Ecuadorian society, *Taller de Comunicación Mujer* presents a framework of the pervasive nature of homophobic societal attitudes and the sinister effects they have on actual human rights of Ecuadorian citizens who should be protected by their own government. This corroborates their subsequent construction of the Ministry of Public Health and the National Council for Psychotropic Substances and Narcotics (CONSEP) as guilty of condoning these crimes through their negligence and indifference: “The lack of responses on the part of the State before these acts of violence shows the disempowerment experienced by LGBTI individuals...”¹⁸²

TCM’s recommendations for action include: the closure of the controversial clinics, the investigation and punishment of crimes committed, the implementation of sanctions against sexuality-based discrimination, the implementation of public policies that guarantee rights for lesbians and trans women, the development of education programs that “eradicate violence against lesbian women,” to develop a database of information about the status of lesbians, and to establish reparations for the human rights violations committed.¹⁸³

TCM uses this report to attribute the incongruence between the legal protections and the physical reality for lesbians and trans women to social attitudes that in turn motivate family action and government inaction. This attempt to attribute blame recalls

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 8.

¹⁸² Ibid. 11.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 15.

the model for social movement organizations to effect change that manifests within individual texts, which I have now revisited in the context of several different discourses. Individual arguments often draw on this process, which calls for problematizing an issue, attributing blame, proposing a solution, and justifying action within a resonant frame.¹⁸⁴ The structure of the report, in itself a manifestation of discourse, perfectly exemplifies this model. The problem: legislative norms are not implemented. The blame: homophobia, heteronormativity, and patriarchy informing the actions of individuals and governmental bodies. The solution: take the actions prescribed by the existing legislation (sanctions, clinic closures, implementation of protective public policy), take reparative action, and then take preventative action (education, information collection). The resonant frame in this case in part calls on the authority of the internationally accepted human rights norms represented by the ICCPR, and in part on the legislation that has already been accepted and instituted in the Ecuadorian Constitution. By discursively constructing the problem in line with a documented model for incurring policy change, this report by TCM represents a powerful rhetorical tool for transnational LGBT activists in Ecuador.

Conservative Conversation

In this section I will examine the appearance (though scarce) of conservative discourse as it relates to the clinics in Ecuador. This includes a Spanish CNN report which provides the only accessible insight into the language used by a director of one of the rehab clinics in Ecuador, and the website of the most publicized “rehabilitation” clinic

¹⁸⁴ See my previous discussion in the introductory section entitled “Transnational Advocacy Networks.”

implicated in the de-homosexualization scandal, *Puente a la Vida*.¹⁸⁵ Most of my sources have so far come from actors within the pro-gay TAN, which undoubtedly leaves my analysis incomplete, but as I have previously mentioned, the clandestine clinics have very little publically accessible discourse with which to engage. This silence in itself is revealing, as it indicates that the clinics' most effective deployment of discourse is often none at all. When they do speak, they speak vaguely, maintaining a type of discursive silence by saying very little. They address, obscurely, the improvement of behavior and conduct, spiritual purity, and the methods they use to achieve it. This leaves the clinics with the ability to define what constitutes good and bad behavior, and act upon that standard however they see fit.

The CNN report discusses the phenomenon of these clinics from a media perspective, which is to say that it is largely composed of interviews with a victim, Paola, and the coordinator of the clinic in which she was held, Luis Zavala. Throughout the news video clip, the provocative subtitle reads: "Treatment or Torture?" Paola's testimony closely reflects the language and descriptions of the clinics that appears throughout the publications of pro-LGBT activists. In fact, as she describes being kidnapped and brought to a therapy center in 2006, she pauses to qualify it: "they transferred me to a therapy center—a 'therapy center.'"¹⁸⁶ The reporter in Quito, Andrés López, goes on to describe that Paola was originally enrolled in the clinic by her family "in order to overcome a personal crisis, but nobody imagined the methods that, according

¹⁸⁵ All quotations from these sources are my own translation from Spanish, unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁸⁶ "Clínicas en Ecuador ofrecen "curar" la homosexualidad." CNN. Dec 28 2011. Web. Accessed March 26 2013. <http://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2011/12/28/clinicas-en-ecuador-ofrecen-curar-la-homosexualidad/>: 0:15-0:24.

to her, they used to break her personality and thereby change her.”¹⁸⁷ However, he reveals, a year and a half in the addiction treatment center *Puente a la Vida* failed to change her sexual orientation.

The coordinator Luis Zavala, López continues, “assured that the treatment they offer their patients does not consider mistreatment nor does it seek to change the sexual orientation of its residents; [it seeks] only to improve their conduct.”¹⁸⁸ Zavala himself asserts that the clinic’s goal for its patients is “...to change all of their conduct, all of their inadequate behaviors, which are causing that person to have other inadequate attitudes.”¹⁸⁹ The standard for what constitutes the adequate and inadequate, however, remains unspecified. The Ministry of Health, the report explains, apparently closed the clinic due to the presence of “expired products.” In response to this claim, Zavala notes, “I would venture to think that perhaps there are hidden forces behind it.”¹⁹⁰ The report shifts at this point to an interview with Juan Moreira, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Health, implicitly suggesting that perhaps he or his department had a part to play in these “hidden forces.” “This isn’t the most serious concern,” he asserts, referring to the expired products. “The most serious concern is that, in this center, there’s a report of a supposed de-homosexualization treatment which implies torture and human rights violations.”¹⁹¹ If this is indeed the Ministry of Health’s “serious” concern, its policy actions fail to reflect it; only a fraction of the existing clinics have been closed to date and

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 0:28-0:40.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 1:15-1:25.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 1:25-1:37.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 1:44-1:57.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 1:57.

no investigations or sanctions have been made on the grounds of the purported human rights violations.

The report ends with a brief interview with Cayetana Salao, a pro-LGBT activist affiliated with Articulación Esporádika. She expresses concern about the high percentage of clandestine clinics in operation, and questions the institutional registry of clinics, as it contains countless entries of locations with human rights complaints or years of uncertified operation. López concludes, “Health authorities assure that this is a high-priority matter, but Paola says she has hundreds of reasons to not believe them.”¹⁹²

The high-profile nature of CNN as a news body must be taken into account; the Ministry of Health is under particular pressure to represent itself as progressive and proactive in such a widely viewed media outlet. The clinician’s position as it is manifested in this report is vague at best. The uncertain terms by which adequacy of behavior and attitude is assessed leaves the clinic room to present itself as neutral, medically and scientifically sound, and working for the best interests of its clients. Zavala’s voiced mistrust of the reasoning behind the closure of his clinic reveals his presentation of the clinic as an innocent victim of surreptitious government action. The denial of any such human rights abuses having taken place within his clinic serves to further buttress this image.

I now turn to this clinic’s website. *Puente a la Vida* (Bridge to Life) is the treatment center that has received the most media attention and criticism for the accusations of human rights violations that have taken place within. Despite closure of the clinic, at the time of writing this paper its site remained accessible online. The site’s

¹⁹² Ibid. 2:57.

“Who We Are” page describes the clinic as a not-for-profit organization specialized in the treatment of addictions, and authorized and accredited by Ecuador’s National Council for Psychotropic Substances and Narcotics (CONSEP). The section goes on to describe that “In its work methods, the therapeutic team keeps in mind the need to individualize the treatment so that it can attend to the needs and particular circumstances of each person...with the intention of achieving the incorporation of families into the rehabilitation process...”¹⁹³ This echoes the vagueness of the discourse used by Zavala in the CNN report, leaving the assessment of what constitutes proper treatment up to the clinic’s staff, depending on their interaction with each patient. While leaving the therapy methods open-ended depending on the conditions of the individual could be positive, in light of a lack of professional oversight or internal attitudes of homophobia, it could also prove dangerous to any LGBT patients who might be enrolled.

The admissions information describes “an admissions regiment designed for men and women with drug addictions and behavioral disruptions, apt for patients of any age.”¹⁹⁴ The “behavioral disruptions” again calls to mind the language used by Zavala regarding “adequate” and inadequate behaviors, without characterization based on any kind of authoritative medical standard. Furthermore, “due to the mixed nature of our therapeutic community the conditions of admission...are established in the initial appointment where the aforementioned conditions are clarified to both the incoming patient and their representatives.”¹⁹⁵ In the absence of publically accessible, standardized admissions guidelines, Puente a la Vida has managed to avoid any accountability

¹⁹³ Puente a la Vida. “Quienes Somos.” Web. Accessed March 26, 2013.
<http://www.romsegroup.com/puentealavidacom/>.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. “Perfil de Admisión.”

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

mechanisms. Furthermore, by indicating that incoming patients have representatives, the site constructs an image of patients with no agency, enrolled by a “representative” rather than on his or her own behalf.

The section entitled “Therapeutic Team: Professional Service” describes a professional staff team of individuals including a doctor, psychologists, a social worker, educators, a spiritual guide, and life coaches. This section describes regular and coordinated work with all of these resources, personalized according to the individual’s needs. The types of therapy described include weekly individual and group therapy, spiritual therapy, and family therapy. These therapies are described as different “levels” or “types of intervention.” The spiritual therapy section describes “a search to guide the patients to an encounter with a Higher Power and the necessary conviction. The program has no particular religious inclination, but is fundamentally spiritual.”¹⁹⁶ The indeterminacy with which the clinic navigates an issue as important as its religious affiliation leaves a hanging uncertainty about what convictions it will deem necessary to guide its patients toward, and what kind of spiritual authority, if any, it depends upon. The variety of manners with which various theological traditions understand and address the human condition could result in a variety of therapeutic philosophies; for example, does the clinic subscribe to the doctrine of Original Sin? In light of the concerning connections between conservative Christianity and reparative therapy efforts worldwide, the spiritual affiliation of the center would perhaps prove more revealing about its ideological leaning.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. “Servicio Profesional.”

What goes unspoken by these clinics is perhaps their most revealing discourse. In what little rhetoric I have examined, clinic representatives and resources never address homosexuality. The types of behavioral deviation that the clinics claim to treat remain undefined and undescribed, as do the standards for adequate attitudes and behavior. Puente a la Vida, specifically, does not claim to follow any industry or professional protocol, nor does it publicize its professional policies in any way by which it could be held accountable to them. Puente a la Vida is a rare example of a clinic with accessible discourse, and this serves to highlight the clandestine nature of its peers. By operating under the radar, the majority of these clinics manage to keep their rhetoric out of the public eye. This protects them from exactly the kind of scrutiny to which Luis Zavala and Puente a la Vida have been subject, and allows them a degree of maneuverability and flexibility when it comes to their therapy practices and philosophies. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the decision of Articulación Esporádika, Taller de Comunicación Mujer, and the transnational network of pro-LGBT activists to expose these clinics to a high degree of publicity is strategically more than just throwing the boomerang. It also reflects their recognition of the function of this absence of public discourse as protective and enabling, and confronts it with highly public, human rights rhetoric.

Conclusion

This study has served to fill three theoretical gaps in the existing literature about gay rights mobilization. Primarily, it addresses the critical role of opposing transnational advocacy networks (TANs) in influencing the strategies and discourses deployed by their opponents. The Mexico case study revealed that the Christian TAN that mobilizes in favor of sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) in Latin America deploys a rhetoric that constructs its efforts to change homosexuality as medically restorative of individuals to God's original design for them. In response, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO), members of the pro-LGBT TAN, launched public awareness campaigns to construct homosexuality as a medically natural expression of human sexuality, requiring no cure. The Ecuador case further revealed that the pro-LGBT TAN also combats reparative therapies with human rights rhetoric and international petitions that challenge SOCE as violating internationally accepted human rights norms. In response, the Christian pro-SOCE TAN has frame-jacked the human rights approach, touting the right to self-determination as a defensive strategy, and beginning to use its opponents' online petition tactic to do so. The pro-LGBT TAN largely demonizes homophobic discourse as a social ill, while the pro-SOCE TAN demonizes human brokenness and moral decay. Both sides attempt to discredit the scientific evidence of their opponents in order to establish the nature of homosexuality in a politically expedient way. Both sides present themselves as advocates—to varying degrees—for the LGBT community. This constant rhetorical give and take between actors reveals that though local liberal activists may throw boomerangs, conservative activists are often throwing punches in return.

The second gap this paper has filled is the discussion of conservative actors as they mobilize against liberal causes outside of the institutional sphere. The conservative Christian TAN over the last decade has taken up international activism in the UN like never before, but it also has developed a widespread presence in Latin America, setting up offices, conducting conferences and disseminating information directly at the grassroots level. This demonstration of pro-SOCE activism and mobilization on a practical rather than political level reveals an interaction with and construction of local discourses that has a concrete effect on local perceptions of homosexuality. PAHO and IDAHO's assertion that homophobic discourse itself is a deadly social ill brings this grassroots-level activism to the forefront of our picture of gay rights and LGBT health in Latin America today, and demonstrates the power of language to construct the world we inhabit.

The third gap this paper has filled has been to address the question of reparative therapy as it plays out in practice in Latin America, and the discourses that serve to perpetuate and legitimate it. During a time in which political attention to LGBT rights is at an all-time high worldwide, and reparative therapies are being called into question in state legislatures across the United States and national legislatures across the globe, this discussion has wide-reaching implications for the future of the global gay rights debate. The deployment of a transnationally developed and dynamic Christian rhetoric that both creates resonant new frames and framejacks those of its opponents reveals the mechanisms that underlie the battle over reparative therapy.¹⁹⁷ The transnational nature of this discourse allows this examination to have global implications, rather than only in the

¹⁹⁷ For a further discussion of framejacking, see Bob 2012: Chapter 2, section entitled "Persuasion and Dissuasion."

limited Latin American settings I have examined here. If indeed reducing or eliminating SOCE will improve the lives of LGBT individuals, understanding the underlying social movement politics—both locally and transnationally—will be a crucial step toward effecting positive change.

This study has posed many more questions than it has answered. It calls for a further temporal examination of this discursive interaction between advocacy networks; that is, how has their language shifted over time and what does this reveal about effective framing techniques and the rapid shifts that have taken place in political opportunities for pro- and anti- LGBT activists? It asks about the resonance of Western human rights discourse in Latin American nations, whose combination of anti-neoliberal sentiment and historical intimacy with gross human rights violations complicates their interaction with that language. One of the most compelling questions this study has posed is the following: despite bad press, international pressure, and contrary local legislation, why are “de-homosexualization” clinics in Ecuador still open? Why does Camino a la Castidad continue to meet each year? Though this study has pointed toward the discursive battle between pro-SOCE and pro-LGBT actors as constructive of the situation for LGBT rights, it has not completely explained where and why the boomerang model fell short. Perhaps we are entering the debate just as change is taking place, or perhaps there are other barriers to the boomerang that remain unexamined.

Far from being an objective study of the interacting and competing rhetoric regarding SOCE, this thesis now forms a part of the compilation of texts and discourses on the topic. Therefore, as research into the language about SOCE and LGBT rights continues, a dynamic and ever-critical perspective will be necessary to account for the

constantly changing face of the topic's cultural archive. With the addition of field research, this study could also grow to represent more effectively the discourses deployed in local settings, rather than simply those accessible on the Internet. By studying and interacting with the activists who continue to work on these causes in Ecuador, Mexico, and undoubtedly many other nations, my examination of local language could be much more representative and penetrating. This kind of field research would also lend more direct insight into the strategies and tactics of certain actors within different TANs, and would allow for the development of an analysis that is more sensitive to changes over time.

The status of LGBT human rights will always be uniquely characterized by the cultural and political contexts within which they are protected or violated. In the cases of Ecuador and Mexico, at some level these individuals' rights are both protected *and* violated. Despite progressive legislation protecting for the basic rights of these individuals incorporated at both a state and international level, some subtle but powerful social force counteracts these protections, using rhetoric focused on curing or healing homosexuality as its avenue for legitimacy. The discursive deconstruction of this force can only serve to improve our understanding and navigation of it. With this in mind, is my sincere hope that in the words of Richard Cohen and many others, *change is possible*.

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